

# **EXHIBIT B**

**COUNTER  
EXTREMISM  
PROJECT**

***Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)***

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**Name:** Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

**Type of Organization:**

- Insurgent
- non-state actor
- terrorist
- transnational
- violent

**Ideologies and Affiliations:**

- Al-Qaeda affiliated group
- Islamist
- jihadist
- Qutbist
- Salafist
- Sunni

**Place of Origin:**

Syria and Iraq

**Year of Origin:**

Formed 2011, declared January 2012

**Founder(s):**

Abu Mohammad al-Golani, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

**Places of Operation:**

Syria and Lebanon

**Overview**

*Also Known As:*

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## ***Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)***

- Al-Nusra Front<sup>1</sup>
- Al-Nusra Front to Protect the Levant<sup>2</sup>
- Al Nusra Front for the People of Levant<sup>3</sup>
- Al Nusra Front for the People of the Levant<sup>4</sup>
- Al-Nusra Front in Lebanon<sup>5</sup>
- Ansar al-Mujahideen Network<sup>6</sup>
- Assembly for Liberation of the Levant<sup>7</sup>
- Assembly for the Liberation of Syria<sup>8</sup>
- Conquest of the Levant Front<sup>9</sup>
- Fatah al-Sham Front<sup>10</sup>
- Fateh al-Sham Front<sup>11</sup>
- Front for the Conquest of Syria<sup>12</sup>
- Front for the Conquest of Syria/the Levant<sup>13</sup>
- Front for the Liberation of the Levant<sup>14</sup>
- Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham<sup>15</sup>
- Hayat Tahrir al-Sham<sup>16</sup>
- Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham<sup>17</sup>
- HTS<sup>18</sup>
- Jabhat al-Nusra<sup>19</sup>
- Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham<sup>20</sup>
- Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham Min Mujahedin al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad<sup>21</sup>
- Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham Min Mujahideen al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad<sup>22</sup>
- Jabhat Fatah al-Sham<sup>23</sup>
- Jabhat Fateh al-Sham<sup>24</sup>
- Jabhat Fath al Sham<sup>25</sup>
- Jabhat Fath al-Sham<sup>26</sup>
- Jabhet al-Nusra<sup>27</sup>
- Jabhet al-Nusra<sup>28</sup>
- Levantine Conquest Front<sup>29</sup>
- Levantine Mujahideen on the Battlefields of Jihad<sup>30</sup>
- Liberation of al-Sham Commission<sup>31</sup>
- Liberation of the Levant Organization<sup>32</sup>
- Support Front for the People of the Levant<sup>33</sup>
- Tahrir al-Sham<sup>34</sup>
- Tahrir al-Sham Hay'at<sup>35</sup>
- The Al Nusra Front for the People of the Levant<sup>36</sup>
- The Defense Front<sup>37</sup>
- The Front for the Defence of the Syrian People<sup>38</sup>
- The Front for the Defense of the Syrian People<sup>39</sup>
- The Front for the Liberation of al Sham<sup>40</sup>
- The Support Front for the People of Syria from the Mujahideen of Syria in the Places of Jihad<sup>41</sup>
- The Victory Front<sup>42</sup>

### *Executive Summary:*

The Nusra Front—also known as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (“the Levantine Conquest Front”)—is an internationally sanctioned terrorist group, the second-strongest insurgent group in Syria after [ISIS](#) [1], and a formerly open [al-Qaeda](#) [2] affiliate that seeks to replace the Assad regime with an Islamic state. Operating as a part of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham coalition since January 2017,<sup>43</sup> the Nusra Front stands accused of serving as a base for global al-Qaeda operations.<sup>44</sup> In the years since its formation in 2011, the Nusra Front has gradually amassed and sustained territory throughout Syria.<sup>45</sup> As of early 2019, the Nusra Front controls or administers all of the Syrian opposition-held parts of Idlib, north Hama, and west Aleppo.<sup>46</sup>

Originally al-Qaeda’s formal affiliate in Syria, the Nusra Front has since claimed to have dissociated entirely from the international terrorist organization, despite the Nusra Front’s long and proven history of serving as its loyal affiliate. On July 28, 2016, al-Qaeda released an audio statement giving the Nusra Front formal permission to break ties if the link was “conflicting with [the Nusra Front’s] unity and working as one body.”<sup>47</sup> Nusra Front leader [Abu Muhammad al-Golani](#) [3] declared a formal split from al-Qaeda after thanking “our brothers, the commanders of al-Qa’eda,” and announcing the group’s name change from Jabhat al-Nusra (“the Victory Front”) to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (“the Levantine Conquest Front”).<sup>48</sup> Analysts had long surmised that a break from al-Qaeda, however artificial, could enable the Nusra Front to attract more funding from Gulf States like Qatar, consolidate local support, and present itself as a legitimate insurgent group in Syria.<sup>49</sup>

The Nusra Front continued to pursue this strategy when, on January 28, 2017, it announced that it was dissolving its organization to be subsumed under a larger Syrian Islamist merger, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (“Assembly for the Liberation of the Levant” or HTS), initially led by [Hashim al-Sheikh](#) [4], the former leader of fellow Islamist faction Ahrar al-Sham.<sup>50</sup> While the Nusra Front continues to operate under the HTS name, Sheikh resigned from his post on October 1, 2017, and the group has suffered dozens of defections.<sup>51</sup> Analysts estimated that by September 2017 HTS had reverted back to its core of about 10,000 fighters mostly belonging to the Nusra Front.<sup>52</sup> By the end of 2018, HTS had an estimated 12,000 to

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20,000 fighters.<sup>53</sup>

For years before the announced split, however, Golani had reaffirmed his group's allegiance to al-Qaeda. The Nusra Front's founder, current ISIS leader [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#) [5], claims to have dispatched Golani and others—then al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) fighters—into Syria in 2011 in order to take advantage of the power vacuum stemming from the civil war.<sup>54</sup> The United States confirms this claim, maintaining that the Nusra Front was formed by AQI to “hijack the struggles of the legitimate Syrian opposition to further its own extremist ideology.”<sup>55</sup> In April 2013, after Baghdadi unilaterally claimed to subsume the Nusra Front into AQI, now known as ISIS, Golani broke ties with Baghdadi and reaffirmed his allegiance to al-Qaeda central.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the group's origins in Iraq and historical deference to al-Qaeda, the Nusra Front has branded itself as a native rebel group with foreign experience. In Syria, the group continues to profess its goal of toppling the Assad regime and establishing an Islamic state in its place, albeit incrementally. In its effort to consolidate local support, the Nusra Front has adopted military and outreach strategies from al-Qaeda-linked jihadist Abu Musab al-Suri: participating in numerous Syrian-based coalitions and collaborating with other Islamist, and occasionally secular, rebel groups to carry out joint attacks against Assad forces.<sup>57</sup> The Nusra Front, and then HTS, also operated a civil administrative wing called the “Public Services Administration” which provided basic administrative needs and security and governed several rebel-controlled towns under various forms of Islamic law.<sup>58</sup> On November 2, 2017, HTS announced the formation of the “Salvation Government,” a civilian-run administrative and political body in Idlib chaired by Mohammad al-Sheikh. HTS reportedly handed over control of its Public Services Administration to the Salvation Government.<sup>59</sup>

Although the group has succeeded in embedding itself in the Syrian insurgency, the Nusra Front remains committed to employing terrorist tactics in order to secure an Islamic state. Since its founding, the Nusra Front has conducted formal military campaigns, assassinations, hostage takings, and ‘lone wolf’ operations, including suicide bombings. By June 2013, the Nusra Front had claimed responsibility for 57 out of 70 suicide attacks conducted during Syria's civil war.<sup>60</sup> The group has since continued to carry out its signature suicide bombings in Syria and expanded its operations into neighboring Lebanon after [Hezbollah](#) [6] joined the war in mid-2013.<sup>61</sup> In Lebanon, the Nusra Front works to stoke sectarian divisions, conducting and attempting suicide bombings against civilian centers like Beirut and Hezbollah strongholds like Hermel, along Lebanon's northeastern border with Syria.<sup>62</sup> The Nusra Front also employs arbitrary detention and torture in order to silence its critics and opposition activists. According to a Human Rights Watch report, HTS detained more than 184 people in Idlib in the last three months of 2018.<sup>63</sup>

The terrorist Nusra Front group has attracted the largest contingency of foreign fighters to Syria after ISIS, reportedly consisting of 3,000 to 4,000 foreigners as of late 2018.<sup>64</sup> The group regularly engages in violent clashes with other rebel groups in northern Syria, and conducts operations to arrest civilian protesters.<sup>65</sup>

### *Doctrine:*

The Nusra Front adheres to a Salafist, jihadist ideology with the professed aim of establishing Islamic governance in all areas under its control. In the group's January 2012 inaugural video, a masked representative outlined its regional objectives. He introduced the Nusra Front as “Syrian mujahedeen” who have come “back from various jihad fronts to restore God's rule on the Earth [Islamic law] and avenge the Syrians' violated honour and spilled blood.”<sup>66</sup>

Years later, when Golani announced the Nusra Front's dissociation from al-Qaeda, he reaffirmed the group's core objectives, saying that despite separating from al-Qaeda, the group would not be “compromising or sacrificing our solid beliefs or laxity in the necessity of the continuity of the Jihad of Al-Sham [Syria].”<sup>67</sup> Golani reaffirmed that his group sought to use “Islamically legitimate means” to unify jihadists in Syria and the “masses of people in Al-Sham [Syria]” in order to replace the Assad government with one based on sharia (Islamic law).<sup>68</sup>

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Despite these affirmations, the Nusra Front continues to struggle with its identity. On November 27, 2017, Golani ordered the arrests of [Sami al-Oraidi](#) [7], the former head of the Nusra Front's Sharia Council, Abu Julaihib al-Ordoni, former Dara'a commander for the Nusra Front, Abu Khadija al-Ordoni, and Abu Mussaab al-Libi. All four were prominent Nusra Front leaders with strong ties to al-Qaeda.<sup>69</sup> Following these arrests, several HTS members resigned and several large factions threatened to break away, prompting Golani to renew negotiations with al-Qaeda that ultimately led nowhere.<sup>70</sup> On December 4, 2017, HTS released Ordoni in a bid to ease tensions within the group. Ordoni immediately renewed his pledge to al-Qaeda upon release.<sup>71</sup>

Following these arrests, several subgroups of devoted al-Qaeda supporters defected from HTS. On December 5, 2017, HTS faction Jaish al-Badia defected, creating a new Telegram channel devoted to al-Qaeda.<sup>72</sup> Jaish al-Malahem followed three weeks later, also indicating support for al-Qaeda in its new Telegram channel while on February 7, 2018, a new al-Qaeda-supporting group, Jund al Shariah, announced its formation.<sup>73</sup> On February 28, 2018, these three groups along with three other small militant factions announced a merger under the name Hurras al-Deen, or Guardians of the Religion, and declared themselves an unofficial affiliate of al-Qaeda.<sup>74</sup> Oraidi and Ordoni both joined Hurras al-Deen's Shura council and have reportedly begun talks with al-Qaeda leader [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#) [8] to make Hurras al-Deen the official al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. Hurras al-Deen remains at odds with HTS.<sup>75</sup>

While some Syria analysts argue that this chain of events proves that HTS and the Nusra Front are no longer al-Qaeda affiliates, the U.S. government maintains that the groups are linked. On May 31, 2018, the State Department amended its classification of HTS to include it as "an official alias" of the Nusra Front, which the State Department maintains is still "an al-Qaeda affiliate."<sup>76</sup>

As the war against the Syrian regime slowed down and rebel infighting increased in 2018, the Nusra Front sought to use its recently created Salvation Government, a civilian-run administrative and political body in Idlib chaired by Mohammad al-Sheikh, to exert political control over territory that escaped its military control.<sup>77</sup> In January 2019, HTS succeeded in using its military power to force all other rebel groups in Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo to either hand direct control of their towns to HTS or to allow the Salvation Government to take over their towns' local councils.<sup>78</sup>

While the Nusra Front works to establish Islamic law in all areas under its control, it has done so incrementally in order to sustain local support. In this way, the group follows the guidelines and strategy of al-Qaeda-linked writer Abu Musab al-Suri, who sought to win the hearts and minds of locals in order to pursue his Islamist objectives.<sup>79</sup> In a statement posted online, Golani said, "Beware of being hard on [the locals]. Begin with the priorities and fundamentals of Islam, and be flexible on the minor parts of religion."<sup>80</sup> In a December 2012 interview with the Dubai-based *National*, Golani said that his group's "first goal is to get rid of Assad. Then we want a state where the Quran is the only source of law."<sup>81</sup>

While the Nusra Front has generally followed these guidelines, there are several instances where regional leaders have been quick to impose harsh interpretations of Islamic law onto local populations and use violence to force conversions.<sup>82</sup> In January 2015 in the Druze-dominated Jabal al-Summaq mountain in Idlib province, the Nusra Front's then regional emir, Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Tunisi, ordered the local Druze to convert to Sunni Islam and destroyed their shrines.<sup>83</sup> Tunisi was removed from his position after Nusra Front fighters under his command killed 23 Druze civilians in Qalb Lawza during a land dispute. Although the Nusra Front reprimanded Tunisi for the massacre, the group upheld the validity of the forced conversions.<sup>84</sup> The Nusra Front has also reportedly imposed smoking bans on areas it controls, forced clothing shops to cover the heads of mannequins, and jailed men and women for socializing together in public.<sup>85</sup>

Although the Nusra Front publicly emphasizes its regional aims, it has shown signs of a more expansionist ideology in line with al-Qaeda's brand of global jihadism. Despite the group's emphasis on its Syrian character, the Nusra Front expanded its operations into neighboring Lebanon in response to Hezbollah's intervention in Syria.<sup>86</sup> The group also stands accused of plotting attacks against the West,<sup>87</sup> seemingly through the elusive Khorasan group, or what one Dubai reporter has



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exposed as the Nusra Front's 'Wolf unit.'<sup>88</sup> However, the death of Khorasan commander Said Arif in 2015 signaled the effective end of the Nusra Front's external operations.<sup>89</sup> When the Nusra Front was initially sent to Syria, one of its founding goals was reportedly to establish a safe haven for training recruits and stashing weapons,<sup>90</sup> allegedly on behalf of al-Qaeda in Iraq (now ISIS).<sup>91</sup>

### ***Organizational Structure:***

The Nusra Front is both hierarchical and regionalized. Historically, each region has been equipped with an overall leader, a military commander, and a religious leader.<sup>92</sup> The group as a whole has been directed by a small consultative council called *Majlis-ash-Shura*,<sup>93</sup> and headed by its *emir* ("commander" or "prince"), Abu Muhammad al-Golani. For years, Golani has carefully avoided showing his face in public, releasing audio statements and providing in-person interviews to news outlets with his face blurred out. In July 2016, however, Golani appeared in a video to announce his group's formal split from al-Qaeda.<sup>94</sup>

The Nusra Front had previously pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda<sup>95</sup> and reported to the latter group's leader, [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#) [8]. On July 28, 2016, Zawahiri released an audio statement giving the Nusra Front formal permission to break ties with al-Qaeda as needed.<sup>96</sup> Golani accepted the offer, thanking al-Qaeda and its leaders and announcing that the group no longer has "any affiliation to any external entity."<sup>97</sup> After claiming to break with al-Qaeda, the Nusra Front attempted to merge with other large Islamist opposition groups, including Ahrar al-Sham.<sup>98</sup> On January 28, 2017, the Nusra Front announced that it was disbanding as a standalone cell and operating under the banner of HTS, a coalition that combines five major Islamist factions—the Nusra Front, Harakat Nur al Din al Zenki, Liwa al Haqq, Ansar al Din, and Jaysh al Sunna—along with dozens of smaller Islamist and secular Free Syrian Army groups under one central leadership, with Golani heading its militant branch.<sup>99</sup> However after a series of clashes with other rebel groups in Idlib in July 2017, dozens of factions and leaders defected from HTS, reducing the coalition to a core of Nusra Front supporters.<sup>100</sup>

In early 2017, Golani claimed to have stepped aside from his role as the leader of the Nusra Front to defer to Hashim al-Sheikh, leader of the HTS coalition, while Golani became the military commander of the group.<sup>101</sup> However, with Sheikh's resignation in October 2017, Golani once again serves as the undisputed leader of HTS.<sup>102</sup>

According to multiple analyst estimates in 2018, HTS maintains approximately 12,000-20,000 fighters. In contrast, the Nusra Front had an estimated 5,000-7,000 fighters in 2016.<sup>103</sup> The Nusra Front has also attracted the largest contingency of foreign fighters after ISIS.<sup>104</sup> Its militant branch is responsible for conducting coordinated attacks against the Assad regime, loyalists, thugs, and perceived colluders, as well as rival groups like ISIS and secular Free Syrian Army factions. The militant branch also conducts 'lone wolf' operations (including suicide bombings) and hostage missions targeting Lebanese and Syrian civilians.<sup>105</sup> HTS also operates a special military unit known as the "Red Bands" or "Band of Deaths" that is reportedly responsible for conducting raids behind regime frontlines.<sup>106</sup> The group simultaneously stands accused by the U.S. government of plotting attacks against Western targets through its small and secretive "Wolf unit."<sup>107</sup>

In addition to the group's militant branch, the Nusra Front managed civilian services and administration programs, known as *Idarat al-Khidamat al-Ammah* (Public Services Administration) and *Idarat al-Manateq al-Muharara* (Liberated Districts Administration) respectively, to govern areas in northern, western, and southern Syria, alongside other rebel groups.<sup>108</sup> The Nusra Front's civilian branch has previously operated under the direction of its reported head of civilian programs at the time, Hajji Rasoul.<sup>109</sup> In the past, the program has coordinated bread rations and enforced Islamist regulations on the Nusra Front's de facto subjects.<sup>110</sup> As part of the group's governance program, the Nusra Front—alongside its allied rebel groups—levy taxes and control the allocation of special permits to civilian vehicles.<sup>111</sup>



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On November 2, 2017, HTS announced the formation of the Salvation Government, a civilian-run administrative and political body in Idlib chaired by Mohammad al-Sheikh. HTS reportedly handed over control of its Public Services Administration to the Salvation Government.<sup>112</sup> According to Syrian expert Sam Heller, the Salvation government formed through “a miniature, managed version of an inclusive national dialogue,” implying that at least some non-HTS elements are present in the body. However, many analysts and activists believe that the newly formed governing bodies in Idlib are controlled by HTS.<sup>113</sup> In January 2019, a ceasefire between HTS and the Turkish-backed rebel alliance National Liberation Front resulted in the Salvation Government taking control of every local council previously under the control or protection of those rebel groups, making HTS the dominant force in Idlib.<sup>114</sup>

For recruitment and publicity purposes, the Nusra Front has maintained a media branch called al-Manara al-Bayda (“the White Minaret”), which the group has refrained from using since dissociating from al-Qaeda and merging with HTS.<sup>115</sup> This branch had previously maintained the group’s public image and media program, disseminating videos and posting statements by the group on jihadist websites, as well as on encrypted messaging applications, video-hosting websites, and social media websites.<sup>116</sup> HTS has, since its formation in early 2017, begun operating accounts on Twitter<sup>117</sup> and Telegram<sup>118</sup> among other social media platforms, issuing statements, updates, and propaganda materials in a variety of languages including English, Arabic, and Russian.<sup>119</sup>

### ***Financing:***

The Nusra Front has been well-funded since its inception in 2011.<sup>120</sup> By August 2016, the group received streams of funding through a variety of means, including taxation, tariffs, fines, ransoms, international donations, oil sales, looting, and smuggling.<sup>121</sup>

The most stable source of income for the Nusra Front is believed to have come from taxes, tariffs, and fines that the group imposes on locals within its territory. Among the taxes levied by the group are income, business, services and utility taxes, including taxes on access to electricity, water, and bread. The Nusra Front also reportedly receives funding by leasing out homes, and is even reported to have levied a tax on internally displaced persons within Idlib province.<sup>122</sup> In addition to taxes, the group has seized assets from religious minority groups and receives funding through an arms and weaponry tariff on other rebel groups.<sup>123</sup> In this way, the Nusra Front is believed to receive roughly half of the ammunition and weapons sent to the Free Syrian Army in northern Syria.<sup>124</sup>

Following the formation of the Salvation Government in November 2017, the Nusra Front began taxing water and electricity usage in the municipalities under its control.<sup>125</sup> With HTS’s complete administrative takeover of greater Idlib in January 2019, the funds provided through taxation are likely to increase substantially. HTS also captured the Bab al-Halwa border crossing between Idlib and Turkey in July 2017, providing an additional taxation source for the terror organization.<sup>126</sup>

Sources of funding for the group also reportedly include private donations from wealthy individuals in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait, who are believed to launder the funds through small money transfers, or by dispatching the money with individuals who cross state borders into Nusra-held territory.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, the Nusra Front’s decision in July 2016 to dissociate from al-Qaeda is widely believed to have been motivated in large part to enable Qatari-based donors to continue sending money to the Nusra Front without being accused of providing financial support to al-Qaeda.<sup>128</sup>

In addition to foreign donations, the Nusra Front has also secured revenue from oil sales and smuggling,<sup>129</sup> as well as through cigarette smuggling and extortion.<sup>130</sup> Although governments typically deny payment for the release of hostages, the Nusra Front is believed to have racked up millions of dollars through hostage exchanges negotiated by the Qatari government. In one such exchange, the group reportedly received \$4 million when it released four Greek Orthodox nuns in March 2014.<sup>131</sup> In another exchange, the Nusra Front reportedly received \$25 million when it released 45 U.N.





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peacekeepers.<sup>132</sup> U.S. citizen Peter Theo Curtis was believed to have been released in August 2014 in exchange for anywhere between \$3 million and \$25 million, although the circumstances of Curtis's release were not made public.<sup>133</sup>

### ***Recruitment:***

In order to join the Nusra Front, the group has historically required its recruits to procure *tazkiyya* (a voucher on behalf of the recruit) from two commanders on the front lines.<sup>134</sup> Once the recruit was accepted, he would swear *bay'ah* (an oath of allegiance) to the group, thereby cementing his religious commitment.<sup>135</sup>

The Nusra Front has also recruited its members online and in private messaging applications through its former media branches, al-Minara al-Bayda and Fursan al-Sham media. Within Syria, the group has attracted recruits by appealing to the locals in a strategy adopted from al-Qaeda jihadist Abu Musab al-Suri.<sup>136</sup> When it comes to attracting recruits, the Nusra Front holds a financial advantage over competing rebel groups, as it has historically been able to provide members with salaries and weapons.<sup>137</sup> Under HTS, a new media outlet has been created, Ebaa Agency, which produces high-quality videos, infographics, and media statements similar to those of Amaq, ISIS's media wing.<sup>138</sup>

In addition to recruiting guerilla fighters through online and in-person efforts, the Nusra Front stands accused of recruiting child soldiers. The U.N. Human Rights Council's Independent Commission on Syria has issued reports on the Nusra Front's successful recruitment of child soldiers continuing into 2017. In Idlib province, Nusra fighters include boys under the age of 18 and 15, with some manning checkpoints.<sup>139</sup> The Commission found that the Nusra Front specifically targets poor, uneducated boys for recruitment, paying them modest salaries used to support the boys' families.<sup>140</sup>

### ***Training:***

The training process for a new Nusra recruit is believed to last for two months. This training includes a 10-day religious course followed by a six to eight military training program with religious lectures every evening.<sup>141</sup> Training reportedly emphasizes small unit tactics, close combat, assassinations, and raids with exposure to common weapons from AK variants to anti-tank missiles.<sup>142</sup> Recruits that show exceptional promise during training are selected to join the special operations groups Jaish al-Nusra and Quwat al-Nukhba.<sup>143</sup>

Since as far back as 2016, private military contracting company Malhama Tactical has been training Nusra Front fighters in special operation tactics and assisting in developing the small sub-group Quwat al-Nukhba (Elite Forces).<sup>144</sup> Malhama Tactical was founded by an Uzbek veteran of the Russian military known by his pseudonym Abu Rofiq and initially staffed ten trainers, all with military experience from former Soviet states. Abu Rofiq claims to have founded his organization as a for-profit private military contractor that works exclusively with Sunni-Jihadist organizations. Malhama has reportedly been hired to train and fight alongside both the Nusra Front and the Turkistani Islamic Party in Syria.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF SPECIALLY DESIGNATED NATIONALS AND BLOCKED PERSONS ('SDN List')," U.S. Department of the Treasury, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.treasury.gov/ofac/downloads/sdnlist.txt> [9].

<sup>2</sup> "Islamist Group Claims Syria Bombs 'to Avenge Sunnis'," Agence France-Presse, March 21, 2012, <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/21/202177.html> [10].

<sup>3</sup> "ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF SPECIALLY DESIGNATED NATIONALS AND BLOCKED PERSONS ('SDN List')," U.S. Department of the Treasury, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.treasury.gov/ofac/downloads/sdnlist.txt> [9].

<sup>4</sup> "Office of Foreign Assets Control, U.S. Department of the Treasury," U.S. Department of the Treasury, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/terror.txt> [11].

<sup>5</sup> "ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF SPECIALLY DESIGNATED NATIONALS AND BLOCKED PERSONS ('SDN List')," U.S. Department of the Treasury, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.treasury.gov/ofac/downloads/sdnlist.txt> [9].

<sup>6</sup> "Designated Individuals and Organisations," New Zealand Policy, last modified November 26, 2014, <http://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/designated-entities-26-11-2014.pdf> [12].



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- <sup>7</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
- <sup>8</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
- <sup>9</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
- <sup>10</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
- <sup>11</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
- <sup>12</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
- <sup>13</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
- <sup>14</sup> "Counter Terrorism Designations Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 31, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20180531.aspx> [13].
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<sup>119</sup> Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Twitter feed, accessed February 14, 2017, <https://twitter.com/tahriralsham1?lang=en> [76].

<sup>120</sup> Mohammed Alaa Ghanem, "Taking Syria Back From the Extremists," *Washington Post*, December 27, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/taking-syria-back-from-the-extremists/2012/12/27/2b6ce1a6-3d96-11e2-ae43-cf491b837f7b\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/taking-syria-back-from-the-extremists/2012/12/27/2b6ce1a6-3d96-11e2-ae43-cf491b837f7b_story.html) [78].

<sup>121</sup> Christiaan Triebert and Rao Kumar, "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's Income and Resources," Hate Speech International, August 15, 2016, <https://www.hate-speech.org/jabhat-fateh-al-shams-income-and-resources-an-open-source-investigation/#fn-2879-45> [22].

<sup>122</sup> Christiaan Triebert and Rao Kumar, "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's Income and Resources," Hate Speech International, August 15, 2016, <https://www.hate-speech.org/jabhat-fateh-al-shams-income-and-resources-an-open-source-investigation/#fn-2879-45> [22].

<sup>123</sup> Christiaan Triebert and Rao Kumar, "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's Income and Resources," Hate Speech International, August 15, 2016, <https://www.hate-speech.org/jabhat-fateh-al-shams-income-and-resources-an-open-source-investigation/#fn-2879-45> [22].

<sup>124</sup> Christiaan Triebert and Rao Kumar, "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's Income and Resources," Hate Speech International, August 15, 2016, <https://www.hate-speech.org/jabhat-fateh-al-shams-income-and-resources-an-open-source-investigation/#fn-2879-45> [22].

<sup>125</sup> Sune Engel Rasmussen, "As Islamic State Fades in Syria, Another Militant Group Takes Root," *Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-islamic-state-fades-in-syria-another-militant-group-takes-root-1524064045> [61].

<sup>126</sup> Sune Engel Rasmussen, "As Islamic State Fades in Syria, Another Militant Group Takes Root," *Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-islamic-state-fades-in-syria-another-militant-group-takes-root-1524064045> [61].

<sup>127</sup> Oliver Holmes and Alexander Dziadosz, "Special Report: How Syria's Islamists Govern with Guile and Guns," Reuters, June 20, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/20/us-syria-rebels-governance-specialreport-idUSBRE95J05R20130620> [79]; Suleiman al-Khalidi, "Syrian Al Qaeda Reach Foothills of Israeli-Held Golan," Reuters, May 22, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/22/us-syria-south-insight-idUSBREA4L03Z20140522> [80]; Christiaan Triebert and Rao Kumar, "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's Income and Resources," Hate Speech International, August 15, 2016, <https://www.hate-speech.org/jabhat-fateh-al-shams-income-and-resources-an-open-source-investigation/#fn-2879-45> [22].

<sup>128</sup> Raf Sanchez, "Al-Qaeda leader gives blessing for terror group to form own 'Islamic state' in Syria," *Telegraph* (London), May 8, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/08/al-qaeda-leader-gives-blessing-for-terror-group-to-form-own-islam/> [81]; David Roberts, "What drove Syria's Nusra Front to detach itself from al-Qaeda?" BBC News, July 29, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36922079> [82]; Zvi Bar'el, "Nusra Front Eyes Legitimacy in Syria After Amicable Split With Al-Qaeda," *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), July 31, 2016,



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***Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)***

**Key Leaders**



**Abu Muhammad al-Golani**  
Leader, overall leader of HTS coalition



**Anas Hassan Khattab**  
Administrative leader



**Abu 'Abdallah al-Shami'**  
Top sharia official of HTS



**Abu Marieh Qahtani**  
Former Emir of Nusra in Deir Ez Zor,  
leading HTS cleric



**Abu Jaber al-Shami**  
HTS Emir of the South



**Mostafa Mahamed a.k.a. Abu Sulayman**  
Former director of foreign media relations,  
former member of the General Islamic  
Council, former propagandist, former senior  
official, former senior spiritual advisor, former  
top sharia official



**Sheikh Bashar al-Shami**  
Head of HTS Shura Council



**Abu al-Fatah al-Farghali**  
HTS jurist



# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

Among the arrested men is the president of the humanitarian aid NGO Fukara Der. Source: Menekse Tokyay, "Turkey crackdown on Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham network," Arab News, January 13, 2019, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1434976/middle-east> [93].

- January 10, 2019:** HTS signs a ceasefire with the National Liberation Front (NLF) in which NLF factions Ahrar al-Sham and Suqour al-Sham agree to hand over administration in all of their remaining areas to the HTS-controlled Salvation government.  
As a result, HTS controls or administers all of rebel-held greater Idlib. Sources: "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Takes Over Idlib After Ceasefire Deal," Ashawraq al-Awsat, January 10, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1540261/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-takes-over-idlib-after-ceasefire-deal> [24]; Josko Baris, "Syrian War Daily - 10th of January 2019," Syrian War Daily, January 10, 2019, <https://syrianwardaily.com/2019/01/10/syrian-war-daily-10th-of-january-2019/#more-10029> [25].
- December 28, 2018:** HTS accuses rebel group Nour al-Din al-Zenki of killing five of its fighters in western Aleppo and uses this as an excuse to move fighters and weapons to its frontline with al-Zenki during the last days of December.  
Source: Breizhman, Twitter Post, December 28, 2018, 7:53 a.m., <https://twitter.com/jisrty/status/1078635017981566978> [94]; Breizhman, Twitter Post, December 20, 2018, 8:12 a.m., <https://twitter.com/Breizhman1983/status/1079364649588572160> [95].
- October 14, 2018:** Under a negotiated deal between Turkey and Russia, Turkey agrees to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib, from which HTS and other armed groups will withdraw.  
In exchange, Russia agrees not to launch an offensive with Syrian forces in Idlib against HTS forces. HTS releases a statement accepting the deal for Idlib while emphasizing that they will not hand over weapons or abandon Jihad. Hurras al-Din rejects the proposal. Sources: Putintin, Twitter Post, October 14, 2018, 1:30 p.m., <https://twitter.com/putintin1/status/1051525565889597440> [96]; Mariya Petkova, "After the Sochi agreement, HTS is facing internal divisions," Al Jazeera, September 27, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/turkey-idlib-180924191442969.html> [35].
- May 10, 2018:** Italian police arrest 14 people in Sardinia in connection with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.  
Of those arrested, 10 are accused of money laundering and fundraising for the group while the other four are accused of being members of a "support cell" for the group. Source: "Italy breaks up Syrian jihadist funding ring," BBC, May 10, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44057652> [97].
- April 24, 2018:** HTS signs a peace agreement with the rebel alliance known as Jabhat Tahrir Suriya (JTS) ending 63 days of intense fighting between the two groups in greater Idlib.  
Source: Qal Qal, Twitter post, April 24, 2018, 3:35pm, <https://twitter.com/Alqalqal/status/988863912924925953> [98].
- January 4, 2018:** FSA political chief Liwa al-Mutasim blames Golani for the rapid fall of rebel positions in Idlib, stating that Golani prevented Turkey from establishing checkpoints to monitor the previous ceasefire.  
Source: Cody Roche, Twitter post, January 4, 2018, 2:55 p.m., [https://twitter.com/badly\\_xerxed/status/949006468078071808](https://twitter.com/badly_xerxed/status/949006468078071808) [99].
- January 1, 2018:** HTS joins 11 other rebel factions in forming a joint operations room to counter the ongoing regime offensive toward Abu Duhur airport in Idlib.  
Source: Josko Baric, "Syrian War Daily - 1st of January 2018," Syrian War Daily, January 1, 2018, <https://syrianwardaily.wordpress.com/2018/01/01/syrian-war-daily-1st-of-january-2018/> [100].
- December 2017:** On December 5, HTS faction Jaish al-Badia defects, creating a new Telegram channel devoted to al-Qaeda.  
The Jaish al-Malahem faction follows three weeks later, also indicating support for al-Qaeda in its new Telegram Channel. Source: Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," Lawfareblog, April 8, 2018, <https://lawfareblog.com/true-story-of-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria> [55].
- December 2017:** On December 7, the Salvation Government disbands Jericho's local council, making it the 82nd local council that the Salvation Government is in the process of taking over.  
Six days later, the Salvation Government gives the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) until December 15 to cease all actions and shut down all of its local offices. While the Salvation Government does not follow through on its threat, on December 19, HTS security forces shut down SIG offices in at least three towns and arrest several SIG officials. On December 27, the Salvation Government attempts to take over the Free Aleppo University, sparking two weeks of schoolwide protests. The Salvation Government replaces the university's president and issues stamps and signatures required for all documents to be considered legal. Sources: Aymenn al-Dasouqi, "الهيئة الشرعية... الهيئة الشرعية... الهيئة الشرعية... الهيئة الشرعية", al Modon, December 7, 2017, <http://www.almodon.com/arabworld/2017/12/7/%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B0-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87> [101]; "HTS-backed civil authority moves against rivals in latest power grab in northwest Syria," Syria Direct, December 13, 2017, <http://syriadirect.org/news/hts-backed-civil-authority-moves-against-rivals-in-latest-power-grab-in-northwest-syria/> [102]. "Weekly Conflict Summary December 14-20, 2017," Carter Center, December 20, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.12.14-20.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.12.14-20.pdf) [103]; "HTS continues its attempt to suffocate Free Aleppo University, and the students continue their peaceful struggle against it," Aleppo 24 News, December 5, 2017, <http://en.aleppo24.com/hts-continues-its-attempt-to-suffocate-free-aleppo-university-and-the-students-continue-their-peaceful-struggle-against-it> [104].
- December 3, 2017 - December 4, 2017:** Following the arrests of four prominent Nusra Front leaders, several HTS members resign and several large factions threaten to break away, prompting Golani to renew negotiations with al-Qaeda that ultimately lead nowhere.  
On December 4, HTS release Ordoni, who immediately renews his pledge to al-Qaeda. Source: "Weekly Conflict Summary November 30-December 6, 2017," Carter Center, December 6, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.30-12.05.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.30-12.05.pdf) [54].
- November 2017:** On November 7, HTS and the local rebel faction Nour al-Din al-Zenki violently clash in Idlib along the 12-town border between the two factions.

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

Fighting continues for a week as multiple armed factions side with Zenki against HTS until a ceasefire takes hold on November 15. On November 27, HTS arrests Sami al-Oraidi, the former head of the Nusra Front's Sharia Council, Abu Julaihib al-Ordoni, former Dara'a commander for the Nusra Front, Abu Khadija al-Ordoni, and Abu Mussaab al-Libi. All four were prominent Nusra Front leaders with strong ties to al-Qaeda. By the end of November, more than 35 HTS members, including at least 10 high-profile foreign and local leaders, have been assassinated in Idlib since September 2017. Sources: "Weekly Conflict Summary November 2-8, 2017," Carter Center, November 8, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.02-08.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.02-08.pdf) [105]; "Weekly Conflict Summary November 9-15, 2017," Carter Center, November 15, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.09-15.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.09-15.pdf) [106]; Mona Alami, "HTS Continues to Evolve," Syria Source, December 1, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/hts-continues-to-evolve> [53]; Haid Haid, "Who Is Assassinating Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham's Leaders?" Chatham House, November 2017, <https://syria.chathamhouse.org/research/who-is-assassinating-hayat-tahrir-al-shams-leaders> [107].

- November 2, 2017:** HTS forms the "Salvation Government," a civilian-run administrative and political body in Idlib chaired by Mohammad al-Sheikh.  
HTS reportedly hands over control of its Public Services Administration to the Salvation Government. Sources: Sam Heller, "Turkey Through the Syrian Looking Glass," Century Foundation, November 28, 2017, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/turkey-syrian-looking-glass/> [41]; "الهيئة العامة للخدمات البلدية في إدلب ترحب بالسلطة الجديدة ..", YouTube video, 16:29, posted by محمد بن محمد, November 2, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5orACzyc\\_G8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5orACzyc_G8) [42].
- October 2017:** On October 1, Hashim al-Sheikh resigns as general leader of HTS and takes over the leadership of the Shura Council, while Golani takes over his role as overall emir.  
Between October 7 and 12, HTS forces partially withdraw from the region around Daraat Izza as Turkish forces move in to establish de-escalation monitoring points along the Afrin-Aleppo border. Throughout October an additional 10 factions defect from HTS. Sources: "الهيئة العامة للخدمات البلدية في إدلب ترحب بالسلطة الجديدة ..", Huffington Post Arabic, October 2, 2017, [http://www.huffpostarabi.com/2017/10/02/story\\_n\\_18159996.html](http://www.huffpostarabi.com/2017/10/02/story_n_18159996.html) [31]; "Weekly Conflict Summary September 28 - October 4, 2017," Carter Center, October 4, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.09.28-10.04.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.09.28-10.04.pdf) [32]; "Weekly Conflict Summary October 5-11, 2017," Carter Center, October 11, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.10.05-11.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.10.05-11.pdf) [108]; "Weekly Conflict Summary September 28 - October 4, 2017," Carter Center, October 4, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.09.28-10.04.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.09.28-10.04.pdf) [32]; "Weekly Conflict Summary October 12-18, 2017," Carter Center, October 18, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.10.12-18.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.10.12-18.pdf) [109].
- September 11, 2017:** Saudi cleric Abdullah al Muhaysni and Muslih Al Ulyani, both members of the HTS Sharia Committee, announce their resignations following leaked audio of several Nusra Front commanders expressing their loyalty to Golani and disdain for the Sharia Committee and Hashem al-Sheikh.  
More than eight factions defect from HTS following the leaked recordings. Source: "Weekly Conflict Summary September 7-13, 2017," Carter Center, September 13, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.09.07-13.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.09.07-13.pdf) [110].
- April 2017 - July 2017:** HTS clashes with other rebel coalitions and attempts to expand its presence in Damascus, Idlib, and in southern Syria.  
In April and July, the group engages in fierce clashes with competing rebel faction Jaish al-Islam in the East Ghouta pocket of Damascus. During this time, HTS also engages in efforts to expand their presence in the south, including in Dara'a and Quneitra governorates, near the Golan Heights. In July, war breaks out between HTS and Ahrar al-Sham in Idlib. After initial gains by Ahrar al-Sham, HTS captures several towns and encircles the crucial Bab al-Hawa border crossing before a ceasefire takes hold. Sources: Aron Lund, "Syria: East Ghouta Turns on Itself, Again," Century Foundation, May 1, 2017, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/syria-east-ghouta-turns/>; Jaish al-Islam, Twitter post, July 8, 2017, 2:15pm, [https://twitter.com/Islamarmy\\_eng3/status/883751346909966337](https://twitter.com/Islamarmy_eng3/status/883751346909966337); Ahmed Abazeid, "Infighting Continues in Eastern Ghouta as the Regime Advances," Atlantic Council, May 5, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/infighting-continues-in-eastern-ghouta-as-the-regime-advances#.WRB8OussNHE.twitter>; "Weekly Conflict Summary May 11-17, 2017," Carter Center, May 20, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weeklyconflictsummary-may-11-17-2017.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weeklyconflictsummary-may-11-17-2017.pdf); Charles Lister, Twitter post, July 19, 2017, 12:58pm, [https://twitter.com/Charles\\_Lister/status/887658278074818561](https://twitter.com/Charles_Lister/status/887658278074818561).
- February 2017 - April 2017:** The Nusra Front launches or participates in three offensives against government positions in North Hama, Damascus, and Dara'a.  
During these attacks, the Nusra Front conducts more than a dozen suicide bombings and kills hundreds of pro-regime fighters and dozens of civilians. Sources: Paul Antonopolous, "Al-Nusra led offensive against the Syrian Army in Daraa spectacularly fails," al-Masdar News, February 12, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/al-nusra-led-offensive-against-the-syrian-army-in-daraa-spectacularly-fails/>; "Syrian rebels launch attack near Hama," Reuters, March 21, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-hama/syrian-rebels-launch-attack-near-hama-idUSKBN16S2DC>; Abu Summiah al-Khalidi, Twitter post, March 23, 2017, 9:28 a.m., [https://twitter.com/river\\_orontes/status/845130252640645122](https://twitter.com/river_orontes/status/845130252640645122); Qalaat al-Mudiq, Twitter post, March 21, 2017, 9:40am, <https://twitter.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/844227259535900673>; Ebaa Agency, YouTube, March 22, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKERh37fvEk>; Abu Summiah al-Khalidi, Twitter post, March 23, 2017, 9:28am, [https://twitter.com/river\\_orontes/status/845130252640645122](https://twitter.com/river_orontes/status/845130252640645122); "Former Nusra Front says it carried out Damascus bombing," Reuters, January 18, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-nusra-idUSKBN1522WI>; World on Alert, Twitter post, February 12, 2017, 7:06am, <https://twitter.com/worldonalert/status/830795241628241921>; "Syria Conflict: Weekly Conflict Summary," Carter Center, March 3, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.02.23-03.01.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.02.23-03.01.pdf); "Syria Situation Report: March 9 - 17, 2017," Institute for the Study of War, March 17, 2017, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2017/03/syria-situation-report-march-9-17-2017.html?m=1>; "Dozens killed in double suicide attack in Syrian capital," Reuters, March 15, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-blast-idUSKBN16M1J0>; Ellen Francis and Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Syrian forces and rebels fight fierce clashes in northeast Damascus," Reuters, March 19, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-jobar-idUSKBN16Q09X>.
- January 28, 2017:** The Nusra Front releases a statement claiming to unite with four other rebel groups under the name Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).  
The other rebel groups are Nour al-Din al-Zinki, Liwa al-Haqq, Jaish al-Sunna, and Jabhat Ansar al-Din. Dozens of smaller rebel groups join in the ensuing weeks. Sources: "Syria Islamist factions, including former al Qaeda branch, join forces: statement," Reuters, January 28, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-rebels-idUSKBN15COMV>; Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "New Syrian jihadist alliance vows to step up attacks against army," Reuters, February 9, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-jihadists-idUSKBN15O2IV>.

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## *Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)*

- August 2016 - December 2016:** The Nusra Front works alongside other militant groups in an effort to break the government's siege on Aleppo.

In early August, around 7,000 Nusra Front militants gather outside the city with a variety of weaponry, including armored vehicles, rockets, tanks, and artillery. Despite gaining some ground south of the city and temporarily breaking the siege, the attempt ultimately fails. Sources: Lidia Kelly, "Russia Announces Daily Ceasefires in Syria's Aleppo to Let in Aid," Reuters, August 10, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN10L1WL>; Lisa Barrington and Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Jets Pound Rebels After They Break Aleppo Siege," Reuters, August 7, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-idUSKCN10I0M2>.
- July 28, 2016:** Nusra Front leader Abu Muhammad al-Golani declares a formal split from al-Qaeda after thanking "our brothers, the commanders of al-Qa'eda," and announcing the group's name change from Jabhat al-Nusra (the Victory Front) to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (the Levantine Conquest Front).

Source: Nusra Front, Abu Mohammed Joulani commander officially announced the disengagement from al-Qaeda and the establishment of a new entity," YouTube video, posted by "Orient News," July 28, 2016, (video no longer available) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oossAtDYbrs>.
- March 2016 - July 2016:** The Nusra Front launches attacks on both government positions and civilians in Aleppo city, including shelling the Kurdish neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsoud and killing nine civilians.

The Nusra Front continues to publicly reject international cease-fires, conducting three suicide bombings on April 1 alone. The Nusra Front continues seizing weapons from moderate rebel factions in Idlib throughout July. Sources: "At least 9 dead, dozens injured in attacks against Kurdish quarter in Aleppo," Reuters, March 6, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-idUSKCN0W80RU>; "Islamist fighters attack Syrian government forces south of Aleppo: Syrian Observatory," Reuters, March 7, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-nusra-idUSKCN0W91Y8>; Nusra Front, Syrian rebels attack government forces near Aleppo, gain ground," Reuters, April 2, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-aleppo-idUSKCN0WZ0O5>; "Rebels shoot down second Syrian jet in a month," Reuters, April 5, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-jet-idUSKCN0X214E>; "U.S. behind strike that killed Nusra Front's Abu Firas: officials," Reuters, April 4, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-idUSKCN0X11R3>; "UPDATE 1-Russia blames Nusra Front for wrecking planned truce in Syria's Aleppo," Reuters, May 4, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-russia-syria-aleppo-idUSL5N1814MD>; "Nusra captures leader, fighters of Western-backed rebels in northern Syria," Reuters, July 3, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-nusra-idUSKCN0ZJ0F3>.
- March 2015 - February 2016:** The Nusra Front continues to expand in Syria as part of the Jaish al Fatah (Army of Conquest) coalition, capturing all of the Idlib province by mid-May and calling for intensified attacks against the Syrian regime after rejecting a ceasefire in February 2016.

In June, Abu Muhammad al-Golani releases an audio statement mourning the death of al-Qaeda deputy leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi who was killed in a drone strike in Yemen. After the Nusra Front attacks U.S.-trained rebels in early August, the United States expands its bombing campaign against the Nusra Front, killing the high-ranking Sanafi al-Nasr on October 15. Sources: "AFP, 'Syria rebels seize key regime base,' *Guardian* (London), May 19, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/19/syria-rebels-seize-key-regime-base-mastouma-idlib>; "Nusra Front rejects Syria truce, urges stronger attacks: audio statement," Reuters, February 26, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-nusra-idUSKCN0VZ1ZZ>; "Syria's Nusra Front underlines Qaeda link in audio message," Reuters, June 24, 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/06/24/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-yemen-idUKKBN0P41DP20150624>; Patrick J. McDonnell and W.J. Hennigan, "Pentagon ramps up airstrikes in Syria to help U.S.-backed rebels," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-us-syria-20150803-story.html>; "U.S.-led air raid kills 15 al Qaeda fighters in Syria: monitor," Reuters, May 20, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/20/us-mideast-crisis-syria-nusra-idUSKBN0052B120150520>; Agence France-Presse, "US-led air strikes kill seven Al-Nusra members in Syria: monitor," Yahoo News, July 8, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/us-led-air-strikes-kill-seven-al-nusra-225008264.html>.
- March 9, 2015:** The Nusra Front reaffirms its allegiance to al-Qaeda, after rumors that the Nusra Front may break away from al-Qaeda in an effort to appear more moderate.

Source: Agence France-Presse, "Qaeda in Syria denies plan to break away," Yahoo News, March 9, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/qaeda-syria-denies-plan-break-away-194745608.html>.
- October 2014 - February 2015:** The Nusra Front begins targeting moderate rebel forces in Idlib and Aleppo, capturing several villages and killing dozens of U.S.-backed rebels.

On November 15, 2014, the United Arab Emirates designates the Nusra Front as a terrorist organization. Sources: "Al Qaeda Seizes Territory from Moderate Rebel Group," Reuters, October 28, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/28/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idlib-idUSKBN0IH1KW20141028>; Tom Perry, "Al Qaeda in Syria attacks Western-backed rebels," Reuters, January 29, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/29/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKBN0L21ZF20150129>; Agence France-Presse, "Dozens dead as Nusra takes US-backed Syria rebel base: activists," *Daily Star* (Beirut), February 28, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Feb-28/289135-dozens-dead-as-nusra-takes-us-backed-syria-rebel-base-activists.ashx>; "UAE Cabinet Approves List of Designated Terrorist Organisations, Groups," Emirates News Agency, November 15, 2014, <http://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates-international/1395272478814.html>.
- February 2014 - June 2014:** After a month of fighting between ISIS and the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda severs ties with ISIS.

Despite al-Qaeda's demands at a ceasefire, violence continues between the two groups and many Nusra Front leaders and fighters defect to ISIS. In June 2014, Turkey designates the Nusra Front as a terrorist organization. Sources: "Al Qaeda Says Has No Link with Syrian Militant Group ISIL," Reuters, February 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/03/us-syria-crisis-qaeda-idUSBREA1207L20140203>; Yousuf Basil, Mohammed Tawfeeq and Ray Sanchez, "Al Qaeda boss Ayman al-Zawahiri calls for halt to jihadist infighting," CNN, May 3, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/03/world/meast/ayman-al-zawahiri-message-syria/>; "Syria Islamists Challenge ISIL Control of Town on Iraq Border," Reuters, June 28, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/28/us-syria-crisis-iraq-border-idUSKBN0F30B420140628>; AFP, "Al-Qaeda Merges with Isis at Syria-Iraq Border Town," *Telegraph* (London), June 25, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/al-qaeda/10925602/Al-Qaeda-merges-with-Isis-at-Syria-Iraq-border-town.html>; AFP, "Turkey Blacklists Al-Nusra Front as Terror Group," Al-Akhbar English, June 3, 2014, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/20011>.
- January 29, 2014:** U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper tells the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee that the Nusra Front has aspirations to attack the United States.

Source: Patricia Zengerle and Mark Hosenball, "U.S. Spy Chiefs Say Number of Foreign Militants in Syria Rises," Reuters, January 29, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/29/us-usa-security-syria-idUSBREA0S1XL20140129>.

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## *Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)*

- May 2013 - November 2013:** The Nusra Front expands its violent activities to Lebanon and continues to expand in Syria as tensions with the Free Syrian Army arise.  
 The U.S. Treasury Department designates the Nusra Front's leader, Abu Muhammad al-Golani, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. On May 30, the U.N. Security Council amends its designation of al-Qaeda in Iraq to include the Nusra Front as an alias. Several other countries, including the United Kingdom and Canada, later add the Nusra Front to their lists of terrorist organizations. Sources: Dominic Evans, "Syrian Rebels, Hezbollah in Deadly Fight in Lebanon," Reuters, June 2, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/02/us-syria-crisis-idUSBRE95105O20130602>; Mitchell Prothero, Al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front Rebels Blamed for Bloody Fight against Lebanese Army in Sidon," McClatchy DC, June 25, 2013, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2013/06/25/194944/al-qaeda-linked-nusra-front-rebels.html#storylink=cpy>; Oliver Holmes and Erika Solomon, "Syria Rebels Reinforce Key Suburb in Damascus Battle," Reuters, July 16, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/16/us-syria-crisis-idUSBRE96F0EK20130716>; "Syria's al-Nusra Front Claims Assassination of Hama Governor," Al Arabiya, September 7, 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/09/07/Syria-s-al-Nusra-Front-claims-assassination-of-Hama-governor.html>; "Syrian State TV: Hama Province Governor Assassinated in Car Bomb Blast," Al Arabiya, August 25, 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/08/25/syria-car-bomb.html>; "Gaining Ground: The Spread of Iraqi al Qaeda groups in Syria," New York Times, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324807704579082924138453120>; "Syria Designations; Syria Designations Removals; Counter Terrorism Designations; Iran Sanctions Designations and Identifications," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 16, 2013, <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20130516.aspx>; "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Amends Entry of One Entity on Its Sanctions List," United Nations Security Council, May 30, 2013, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc11019.doc.htm>; "UK bans Syria's Al-Qaida-Linked Nusra Front," Associated Press, July 19, 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/uk-bans-syrias-al-qaeda-linked-nusra-front>; "Currently Listed Entities," Public Safety Canada, accessed December 21, 2014, <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrtr/cntr-trrsm/lstd-ntts/crrnt-lstd-ntts-eng.aspx#2049>.
- April 9, 2013:** Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announces a merger with the Nusra Front to form the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).  
 The following day, Nusra Front leader Abu Muhammad al-Golani releases a statement rejecting the merger with AQI and officially pledging allegiance to al-Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri. Source: "Syria Crisis: Al-Nusra Pledges Allegiance to Al-Qaeda," BBC News, April 10, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22095099>.
- February 2012 - December 2012:** The Nusra Front carries out nearly 600 attacks in major cities across Syria, killing Syrian government and military personnel as well as civilians.  
 By the end of 2012, the group has proven itself to be the most effective fighting force among the opposition and concerns begins to rise among moderate rebels that the Nusra Front will continue to overtake Free Syrian Army groups throughout the country. The United States designates the Nusra Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in December of 2012. Sources: "UPDATE 1-Obama: U.S. Now Recognizes Syrian Opposition Coalition," Reuters, December 11, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/12/syria-usa-idUSL1E8NBIMN20121212>; David Ignatious, "Al-Qaeda affiliate playing larger role in Syria rebellion," Washington Post, November 30, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/post/al-qaeda-affiliate-playing-larger-role-in-syria-rebellion/2012/11/30/203d06f4-3b2e-11e2-9258-ac7c78d5c680\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/post/al-qaeda-affiliate-playing-larger-role-in-syria-rebellion/2012/11/30/203d06f4-3b2e-11e2-9258-ac7c78d5c680_blog.html); "[Billing Code: 4710-10] DEPARTMENT OF STATE [Public Notice 8104]," National Archives and Records Administration, December 11, 2012, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2012-29870.pdf>.
- January 23, 2012 - January 24, 2012:** The Nusra Front releases a video announcing its formation.  
 Source: AFP, "Unknown Islamist Group Claims Suicide Attacks in Syria," Al Arabiya News, February 29, 2012, <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/29/197781.html>.



# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## *Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)*

### **Violent history:**

The Nusra Front conducted its first attack on December 23, 2011 when it detonated two car bombs outside of a government security office in Damascus, killing 44.<sup>146</sup> In the following months the Nusra Front drastically increased the frequency and types of attacks carried out against the Assad regime, quickly setting itself apart from other rebel groups with the number of suicide bombings it conducted. As the Nusra Front seized and held territory it began to attack civilians, minorities, and other rebel groups as well. After Hezbollah's intervention on behalf of the Assad regime in mid-2013, the Nusra Front expanded its operations into Lebanon.<sup>147</sup> While the Nusra Front's attacks in Lebanon largely ended by mid-2015, the group still conducts violent activities in Syria's southern governorates of Dara'a and Quneitra, in the Eastern Ghouta pocket of Damascus, and in the rebel-held areas of Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo

- **December 23, 2011:** Two car bombs explode outside government security offices in Damascus, killing at least 44 people. The Nusra Front later claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>148</sup>
- **January 6, 2012:** A suicide bomber detonates bus bombs in Damascus, killing 26 people and wounding 63 others. The Nusra Front later claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>149</sup>
- **February 10, 2012:** Two car bombs explode in Aleppo, killing 28 people. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack on February 27.<sup>150</sup>
- **March 17, 2012:** Suicide bombers attack two government facilities in Damascus, killing 27 people and wounding nearly 100 others.<sup>151</sup> The Nusra Front later claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>152</sup>
- **April 27, 2012:** A suicide bomber attacks a mosque in Damascus, killing at least nine people. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>153</sup>
- **May 2012:** The Nusra Front carries out twin bombings in Damascus, killing 55 people.<sup>154</sup>
- **May 29, 2012:** The Nusra Front captures and kills 13 Syrian security officials, according to a statement released by the group.<sup>155</sup>
- **June 24, 2012:** Syrian state TV says that security forces arrested a would-be suicide bomber and member of the Nusra Front who was planning to detonate a bomb in a mosque the following day.<sup>156</sup>
- **June 27, 2012:** The Nusra Front attacks a pro-Syrian government TV building, killing seven people.<sup>157</sup>
- **July 19, 2012:** The Nusra Front kidnaps and ultimately kills Syrian state TV presenter Mohammed al-Saeed, according to a series of statements released by the group on August 3.<sup>158</sup>
- **August 2012:** The Nusra Front launches a joint operation with the Sahaba Battalion against a police station in the countryside of Damascus, according to a statement released by the group.<sup>159</sup>
- **September 26, 2012:** A suicide bomber detonates a car bomb near a military command center in Damascus, killing 14 people. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>160</sup>
- **October 3, 2012:** Three suicide bombers detonate car bombs in Aleppo, killing dozens of people. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>161</sup>
- **October 9, 2012:** Suicide bombers attack a Syrian intelligence complex outside Damascus. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>162</sup>
- **October 12, 2012:** The Nusra Front captures a Syrian missile base near Aleppo, killing 92 government soldiers.<sup>163</sup>
- **November 2012:** Over the course of 18 statements on jihadist forums, the Nusra Front claims responsibility for 45 attacks that reportedly kill dozens of people, including 60 in a single suicide bombing. Nusra militants clash with Kurds in the border town of Ras al-Ain.<sup>164</sup>
- **November 1, 2012:** Rebels kill 28 soldiers in attacks on three army checkpoints on Syria's main highway. After

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### ***Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)***

storming the checkpoints, soldiers are rounded up and executed, according to video footage of the attack. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a pro-opposition monitoring group, claims that the Nusra Front is responsible for the attacks and executions.<sup>165</sup>

- **November 5, 2012:** A Nusra Front suicide bomber detonates a car bomb in Syria's Hama province, killing at least 50 people, according to SOHR.<sup>166</sup>
- **November 29, 2012:** Footage of a man shooting 10 unarmed prisoners is uploaded to YouTube. The gunman is heard saying, "God is great. Jabhat al-Nusra," referring to the Nusra Front.<sup>167</sup>
- **December 9, 2012:** The Nusra Front is among armed groups that clash in Tripoli, Lebanon, leaving four people dead.<sup>168</sup>
- **December 9, 2012:** The Nusra Front, leading other rebel groups, violently seizes a government army command center in northern Syria.<sup>169</sup>
- **December 12, 2012:** Clashes between the Syrian regime and rebel forces, including the Nusra Front, take place by the Wadi al-Deif military base and the Za'lana checkpoint.<sup>170</sup>
- **December 12, 2012:** Explosions outside Syria's interior ministry leave seven people dead and 50 others wounded, including Syria's Interior Minister. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>171</sup>
- **December 21, 2012:** A video published by the Nusra Front shows dead bodies on a highway in Hama province. The speaker on the video says that 50 men, allegedly fighters for the Assad regime, were killed in an ambush.<sup>172</sup>
- **December 31, 2012:** Nusra operatives capture American photographer Matthew Schrier.<sup>173</sup>
- **January 2, 2013:** The Nusra Front and other rebel groups attack a military airport near Taftanaz, according to pro-opposition monitoring group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.<sup>174</sup>
- **January 20, 2013:** The Nusra Front clashes with pro-government forces near the Wadi al-Deif military base.<sup>175</sup>
- **January 24, 2013:** Masked men believed to be affiliated with the Nusra Front raid the headquarters of two secular civilian organizations in Saraqib.<sup>176</sup>
- **January 24, 2013:** A car bomb allegedly planted by the Nusra Front kills eight members of Syria's military intelligence.<sup>177</sup>
- **January 29, 2013:** Sixty-five people are found bound and shot dead in Aleppo by Syrian opposition activists, who blame Assad loyalists for the executions. The government blames the Nusra Front.<sup>178</sup>
- **February 2013:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for 17 attacks around Damascus in the first half of February, including at least seven bombings.<sup>179</sup>
- **March 7-23, 2013:** The Nusra Front and other rebel groups battle against Assad's forces for control of Syria's 38th division air defense base. The rebels gain control of the base on March 23.<sup>180</sup>
- **April 12, 2013:** Rebel groups, including the Nusra Front, battle Syrian forces in the city of Qamishli, bordering Iraq.
- **April 22, 2013:** Two Nusra Front suicide bombers detonate car bombs in the countryside of Damascus, and other operatives launch mortar and rocket attacks, according to a statement released by the group.<sup>181</sup>
- **May 16, 2013:** A video released on May 16 shows Nusra Front militants executing 11 men for allegedly taking part in massacres on behalf of the Assad regime. The video is believed to have been taken sometime in 2012, according to SOHR.<sup>182</sup>
- **June 2013:** Nusra militants are blamed for wracking the Lebanese coastal city of Sidon in a battle with the Lebanese army.<sup>183</sup>

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## ***Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)***

- **June 2, 2013:** A Nusra Front suicide bomber detonates a car bomb near a police station in Damascus, according to SOHR.<sup>184</sup>
- **July 15, 2013:** The Nusra Front attacks a Kurdish patrol and takes a gunman hostage, according to SOHR. Clashes between the Nusra Front and Kurdish fighters erupt in Ras al-Ain, near the border with Turkey.<sup>185</sup>
- **August 25, 2013:** The Nusra Front assassinates the governor of Syria's Hama province in a car bomb attack.<sup>186</sup>
- **September 10, 2013:** Nusra Front militants shoot 16 Alawites and six Arab Bedouins after storming a village in central Syria.<sup>187</sup>
- **October 17, 2013:** The Nusra Front executes 10 Syrian government soldiers from the Rashidiyah district, according to SOHR.<sup>188</sup>
- **November 20, 2013:** Four suicide bombers detonate car bombs in northern Damascus. The Nusra Front and ISIS take credit for the attacks.<sup>189</sup>
- **November 26, 2013:** The Nusra Front executes of two government soldiers and three "collaborators," according to a statement published by the group's media branch.<sup>190</sup>
- **December 2, 2013:** After several days of fighting, the Nusra Front captures the old city of Maaloula and hold several nuns hostage in a monastery, according to SOHR. Thirteen Greek Orthodox nuns are captured by the Nusra Front and held until March 2014.<sup>191</sup>
- **December 6, 2013:** Fighting breaks out between the Nusra Front and ISIS in the rebel-held city of Raqqa.<sup>192</sup>
- **December 10, 2013:** The Nusra Front executes six members of the Free Syrian Army rebel group for engaging in violent crimes.<sup>193</sup>
- **December 11, 2013:** The Nusra Front and affiliated groups invade Adra Oumaliyah in the Damascus countryside, kidnapping Alawite men, women, and children.<sup>194</sup>
- **December 12-13, 2013:** The Nusra Front is implicated in an attack that kills at least 15 Syrian civilians from the minority Alawite and Druze sects.<sup>195</sup>
- **January 16, 2014:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for a car bomb attack in the Lebanese town of Hermel that leaves four people dead and more than 40 others wounded.<sup>196</sup>
- **January 17, 2014:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for launching rocket fire into the Lebanese town of Aarsal, killing seven people and wounding 15 others.<sup>197</sup>
- **January 21, 2014:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for a suicide bombing in Beirut that leaves at least four people dead and 34 others wounded.<sup>198</sup>
- **January 27, 2014:** A Saudi-born Nusra Front operative blows himself up at a Syrian army checkpoint in the central Hama province, killing 13 people.<sup>199</sup>
- **January 30, 2014:** Syrian state television claims the Nusra Front fired on UN workers as they delivered food to people in parts of rebel-held Damascus, where thousands were trapped by a Syrian army siege.<sup>200</sup>
- **February 1, 2014:** A Nusra Front suicide bomber detonates a car bomb in eastern Lebanon, killing four people and wounding 18 others.<sup>201</sup>
- **February 8, 2014:** A Nusra Front operative detonates a car bomb at a checkpoint in al-Jalma village, Hama province, killing 20 members of the security forces and the National Defense Force, according to SOHR.<sup>202</sup>
- **February 22, 2014:** A suicide bomber detonates a car bomb in Lebanon, killing two Lebanese soldiers and one civilian. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>203</sup>



# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## ***Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)***

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- **March 5, 2014:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for firing three rockets in Lebanon, near the border with Syria.<sup>204</sup>
  - **March 5, 2014:** U.N. human rights investigators release a report holding the Nusra Front and other rebel groups responsible for besieging 45,000 people in two Shiite towns in Syria's Aleppo province.<sup>205</sup>
  - **March 9, 2014:** The Nusra Front releases 13 nuns held hostage since December 2013 in exchange for 150 female prisoners.<sup>206</sup>
  - **March 15, 2014:** The Nusra Front fights the Syrian army to defend the former's hold on Yabroud, a city north of Damascus near the border with Lebanon.<sup>207</sup>
  - **March 16, 2014:** A suicide bomber detonates a car bomb in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, killing two people and injuring 14 others. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>208</sup>
  - **March 27, 2014:** The Nusra Front releases a video showing the group preparing to execute two Saudi fighters.<sup>209</sup>
  - **May 5, 2014:** The Nusra Front and allied rebel groups gain control of the Syrian village of al-Sabha, killing five civilians. Clashes continue between the Nusra Front and ISIS in the outskirts of Deir el-Zour.<sup>210</sup>
  - **May 25, 2014:** Four suicide bombers attack targets in Syria's Idlib province, reportedly on behalf of the Nusra Front. One of the suicide bombers is a U.S. citizen.<sup>211</sup>
  - **Late May 2014:** The Nusra Front briefly kidnaps and tortures three teenagers in eastern Lebanon over an incident linked to trading cigarettes.<sup>212</sup>
  - **June 5, 2014:** The Nusra Front kills a 14-year-old Syrian boy and throws his body onto the side of the road in east Lebanon, according to security sources.<sup>213</sup>
  - **June 20, 2014:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for a car bomb attack in Syria's Hama province that leaves at least 34 people dead and more than 50 others wounded.<sup>214</sup>
  - **August 24, 2014:** The Nusra Front releases a U.S. hostage kidnapped in 2012.<sup>215</sup>
  - **August 27, 2014:** The Nusra Front takes control of the Quneitra border crossing with Israel from Syrian forces.<sup>216</sup>
  - **August 28, 2014:** The Nusra Front kidnaps 45 U.N. peacekeepers from the Syrian side of the Golan Heights.<sup>217</sup>
  - **September 19, 2014:** The Nusra Front kills one of 10 Lebanese soldiers held captive, according to a Twitter statement by the group.<sup>218</sup>
  - **October 5, 2014:** The Nusra Front attacks Hezbollah bases in Lebanon, killing 10 of its fighters.<sup>219</sup>
  - **December 5, 2014:** The Nusra Front kills a captured Lebanese soldier.<sup>220</sup>
  - **January 8-9, 2015:** Nusra militants fight to capture two Shiite villages in Syria but are repelled.<sup>221</sup>
  - **January 10, 2015:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for a double suicide attack in Tripoli, Lebanon, killing at least seven people and wounding more than 30 others. Lebanon's interior minister attributes the attack to ISIS.<sup>222</sup>
  - **January 12, 2015:** After a raid targeting Islamists in Lebanon's prisons, the Nusra Front threatens captive Lebanese soldiers.<sup>223</sup>
  - **January 18, 2015:** The Nusra Front claims to have shot down a Syrian army plane, killing 35 people. The cargo plane was carrying food and ammunition.<sup>224</sup>
  - **January 29, 2015:** The Nusra Front attacks a Western-backed Syrian rebel group west of Aleppo.<sup>225</sup>
  - **February 1, 2015:** A bomb explodes on a bus carrying Shiite Lebanese pilgrims to shrines in Damascus, killing at least
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## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

### *Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)*

six and wounding 27. The Nusra Front claims responsibility for the attack.<sup>226</sup>

- **February 28, 2015:** The Nusra Front kills dozens of U.S.-backed rebels as it captures a military compound in northern Syria.<sup>227</sup>
- **March 12, 2015:** Fifty are left dead when the Nusra Front rebels clash with the Assad regime in Latakia province, northwest Syria.<sup>228</sup>
- **March 27, 2015—March 28, 2015:** The Nusra Front makes advances in Idlib city in northwest Syria, clashing with regime forces. Dozens of militants and four regime soldiers die as a result of the clash, according to SOHR.<sup>229</sup> By March 28, the Nusra Front has seized almost all of Idlib city from regime forces.<sup>230</sup>
- **April 1, 2015:** The Nusra Front joins a rebel coalition to seize Nasib crossing, the only functioning border crossing with Jordan, as well as three military posts nearby.<sup>231</sup>
- **April 24, 2015:** The Nusra Front and other Islamist groups take control of Jisr al-Shughur, the last major regime-held town in Idlib province.<sup>232</sup>
- **May 4, 2015:** Nusra Front fighters, including a suicide bomber, launch an attack in Damascus.<sup>233</sup>
- **May 19, 2015:** The Army of Conquest coalition, including the Nusra Front, captures the Assad regime's largest remaining military base in Idlib province.<sup>234</sup>
- **May 22, 2015:** The Nusra Front is part of an offensive that seizes a hospital from government forces in Idlib province.<sup>235</sup>
- **June 2, 2015:** The Nusra Front announces that it has attacked two Hezbollah outposts in eastern Lebanon, killing several Hezbollah members.<sup>236</sup>
- **June 10, 2015:**

Members of the Nusra Front kill 23 Druze Syrians in the village of Qalb al-Lawzi in the north of Idlib's province.<sup>237</sup> Three days later and after international outcry, the Nusra Front releases an official statement acknowledging that its members attacked Druze but saying that they did so "in clear violation of the leadership's views."<sup>238</sup>

- **July 2, 2015:** Nusra Front and other rebel groups, including Ahrar al-Sham launch a major offensive to gain control of the divided city of Aleppo, Syria.<sup>239</sup>
- **July 3, 2015:** The Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham announce the formation of a new coalition—Ansar al-Shariah—as they and other rebel groups fight government forces in Aleppo.<sup>240</sup>
- **July 10, 2015:** After being held captive for a week—allegedly by Nusra Front members—a priest in Idlib province, Syria, is released by his captors.<sup>241</sup>
- **July 15, 2015:** The Army of Conquest coalition—to which the Nusra Front belongs—announces its offensive against the towns of Fuaa and Kafraya, reportedly the last two Shiite localities held by the regime in Idlib.<sup>242</sup>
- **July 31, 2015:** The Nusra Front attacks the U.S.-trained Division 30 (a.k.a. New Syrian Forces) rebel unit, killing five of its fighters, wounding 18, and kidnapping 20.<sup>243</sup> According to multiple rebel sources who spoke to McClatchy, the Nusra Front was tipped off by Turkish intelligence.<sup>244</sup>
- **August 1, 2015:** The Nusra Front releases a video of the July 31 attack and kidnapping operation against Division 30 rebels. In the video, one member boasts that the Nusra Front has "cut of the hands of the West and Americans."<sup>245</sup> Meanwhile, a religious court run by the Nusra Front executes 10 people in Aleppo, two on charges of adultery and eight on charges of collusion with the Syrian government, according to SOHR.<sup>246</sup>
- **September 9, 2015:** The Nusra Front seizes the Abu al-Duhur airbase from Assad regime forces, thereby capturing

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the final regime position in Idlib province.<sup>247</sup>

- **October 12, 2015:** The Nusra Front calls for attacks against Syrian Alawites in retaliation for Russian airstrikes.<sup>248</sup>
- **November 16, 2015:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for a suicide bombing that it says killed top commanders in the ISIS-affiliated Yarmouk Martyrs Brigades.<sup>249</sup>
- **Late February 2016:** The Nusra Front rejects a cease fire and calls for intensified attacks against Bashar al-Assad and his regime.<sup>250</sup>
- **Early-Mid March 2016:** The Nusra Front and other Islamist insurgent groups launch at least 100 rockets on a Kurdish residential area of Aleppo, killing at least nine civilians and wounding dozens of others, according to SOHR.<sup>251</sup> The Nusra Front later attacks government forces and briefly captures the village of al-Ais before government forces retake the village.<sup>252</sup> The group later seizes bases and weapons, including anti-tank missiles, from Western-backed rebel groups in northwest Syria.<sup>253</sup>
- **March 16, 2016:** The Nusra Front releases a video of Japanese hostage Jumpei Yasuda on Yasuda's birthday, March 16.<sup>254</sup>
- **April 1, 2016:** The Nusra Front carries out three suicide bombings targeting Assad forces near a hillside south of Aleppo.<sup>255</sup>
- **April 5, 2016:** The Nusra Front shoots down a Syrian warplane, capturing the pilot.<sup>256</sup>
- **Early May 2016:** Russia highlights increased violence in Aleppo by the Nusra Front, and claims that the group is responsible for the thwarting of an extended truce.<sup>257</sup>
- **June 2016:** The Nusra Front continues its offensive against Assad forces, reportedly killing dozens of military and civilian targets in Aleppo. In early June, a Russian ceasefire monitoring agency claims that the Nusra Front shelled down 40 people in Aleppo using rocket launchers, canons, mortars, and anti-aircraft missiles.<sup>258</sup>
- **Early July 2016:** The Nusra Front reportedly captures and takes hostage the commander of the Western-backed Jaish al-Tahrir rebel group as well as "scores" of the commander's aides and fighters, according to reports.<sup>259</sup>
- **Mid-July 2016:** The Nusra Front is blamed for launching two rocket attacks in the southern Syrian town of Baath City, killing civilians.<sup>260</sup>
- **January 18, 2017:** The Nusra Front claims responsibility for a suicide bombing attack in Damascus, killing seven people.<sup>261</sup> The following week, the group launches an attack against several Free Syrian Army rebel groups in northwestern Syria.<sup>262</sup>
- **February 12, 2017:** The Nusra Front's HTS coalition claims responsibility for two suicide bombings in the city of Dara'a.<sup>263</sup>
- **February 26, 2017:** The Nusra Front's HTS coalition claims responsibility for five suicide bombings at the Homs City Military Security Headquarters.<sup>264</sup>
- **March 11, 2017:** The Nusra Front's HTS coalition claims responsibility for two suicide bombings in Damascus, killing at least 74 people. HTS claims it targeted Iraqi militiamen while local activists stated that those killed were Shiite pilgrims.<sup>265</sup>
- **March 18 - 23, 2017:** HTS claims responsibility for three suicide bombings targeting regime positions in Jobar, Damascus.<sup>266</sup>
- **March 21 - 24, 2017:** HTS launches an offensive in Northern Hama, carrying out four suicide bombings over the course of the offensive.<sup>267</sup>
- **June 8, 2017:** HTS attacks FSA and Faylaq al Sham units in the town of Maraat al-Numan, killing FSA Colonel Tasyeer

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al-Samahi.<sup>268</sup>

- **June 13, 2017:** HTS kidnaps two FSA commanders in Idlib, Nidal Haj Ali and Ahmed al-Mousa.<sup>269</sup>
- **June 19, 2017:** HTS assassinates the commander of the First Brigade of the Golan Regiment, a pro-government militia in Quneitra.<sup>270</sup>
- **June 23, 2017:** HTS kills several Hezbollah fighters in raids along the Lebanon-Syria border in late June.<sup>271</sup>
- **June 24, 2017:** HTS launches an offensive against al-Baath City, Quneitra.<sup>272</sup>
- **July 14, 2017:** HTS and Ahrar al-Sham clash near the Idlib city of Tal Touqan.<sup>273</sup>
- **July 19 - July 23, 2017:** HTS and Ahrar al-Sham engage in clashes across Idlib and North Latakia, with HTS ultimately seizing control of all of the border crossings with Turkey. On July 23, the two factions reach an agreement temporarily ending hostilities. While part of the ceasefire allows militias which had been forcibly conscripted into HTS as it captured new territory to defect, HTS is not required to return any of its captured towns.<sup>274</sup>
- **August 28, 2017:** Sayyed Barsha, commander of the rebel group Nour al-Din al-Zenki is assassinated by unknown agents. Zenki accuses HTS of carrying out the assassination amid ongoing clashes and kidnappings linked to familial disputes within the Barsha clan, whose members are split between HTS and Zenki.<sup>275</sup>
- **September 6, 2017:** HTS Elite Forces and the PMC Malhama Tactical raid regime positions in the Air Force Intelligence complex of Aleppo.<sup>276</sup>
- **September 19, 2017:** HTS units and fighters from the Turkistani Islamic Party launch an attack against regime positions in northern Hama using at least one SVBIED, briefly seizing control of the villages of Ma'an and Tulaysiyah.<sup>277</sup>
- **October 2017:** On October 9, ISIS fighters backed with heavy armor enter rebel-controlled Hama from regime-controlled Hama sparking clashes with HTS. Over the next two weeks HTS uses artillery, tanks, and SVBIEDs to counter the ISIS offensive, reversing most of ISIS's gains.<sup>278</sup> At the same time, the Syrian regime launches a new offensive against HTS in Hama, targeting the villages the group had recently recaptured from ISIS. HTS launches a new counter-offensive against the regime in response, utilizing at least two SVBIEDs.<sup>279</sup>
- **November 2017:** On November 7, clashes renew between HTS and Nour al-Din al-Zenki in Idlib along the 12-town border between the two factions.<sup>280</sup> Fighting continues for a week as multiple armed factions side with Zenki against HTS until a ceasefire takes hold on November 15.<sup>281</sup> On November 27, HTS launches another counter-offensive against ISIS in north Hama after ISIS reinforcements arrived from Deir Ez Zor through regime territory. On the same day, the regime expands its ongoing offensive against the rebels by seizing two towns from HTS near Khanasir, Aleppo.<sup>282</sup> These positions are recaptured by HTS in a counter-attack launched on November 29.<sup>283</sup>
- **December 2017:** In Damascus, HTS and Ahrar al-Sham launch "Phase 2" of their offensive against regime forces stationed in the vehicle management base in Harasta. The rebel forces manage to besiege the base for several days, killing seven generals in the fighting.<sup>284</sup>
- **January 31, 2018:** HTS executes two individuals accused of assassinating HTS fighters in Daraat Izza, north Syria.<sup>285</sup>
- **February 2-3, 2018:** Civilians in the rebel-held town of Binnish protest against HTS, tearing down the group's flag and replacing it with the Free Syrian Army flag after accusing the group of not doing enough to deter regime advances. HTS fighters kill one civilian in the ensuing clashes.<sup>286</sup>
- **February 3, 2018:** HTS shoots down a Russian Su-25 plane over Idlib and kill the pilot after he opens fire on them with his sidearm.<sup>287</sup>
- **February 20, 2018:** HTS launches wide-scale attacks on Jabhat Tahrir Suriya (JTS), the new rebel group formed two days prior through the merger of Nour al-Din al-Zenki and Ahrar al-Sham. On February 23 HTS seizes two villages in Idlib while losing one village in Aleppo.<sup>288</sup>

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- **March 1, 2018:** HTS kills several JTS fighters and takes control of the towns of Maaret Misrin, al-Tawame, Kafer Halab, Miznaz, al-Qanater checkpoint, reef al-Mouhandeen, Telaad, Termanin, Zaradna, Hazre, Deir Hasan, and Kafer Yahmoul in Idlib. The group is accused of releasing recently captured ISIS fighters to fight against JTS.<sup>289</sup>
- **March 11, 2018:** HTS renews attacks against JTS towns following a 48-hour ceasefire. Several civilians are killed and wounded as HTS shells Basrton, Saadia, and A'jel in west Aleppo.<sup>290</sup>
- **March 22, 2018:** HTS renews its attacks on JTS held towns in west Aleppo countryside with heavy weapons, including tanks and artillery, wounding several civilians.<sup>291</sup>
- **April 1, 2018:** HTS temporarily detains the negotiating committee of JTS as its convoys enter Idlib city to negotiated a ceasefire between the two groups.<sup>292</sup>
- **April 6, 2018:** HTS and JTS attack each other with heavy weapons in the areas of Ariha and Maarat al-Nu'man, Idlib.<sup>293</sup>
- **April 7, 2018:** HTS and JTS reach a one-week ceasefire under mediation from Faylaq al-Sham, ending the 49-day bout of infighting.<sup>294</sup>
- **April 15, 2018:** HTS launches a new wave of attacks against JTS, capturing the strategic towns of Murek and Khan Sheikhoun along with 11 other villages in southern Idlib.<sup>295</sup>
- **April 28, 2018:** HTS arrests media activist Ahmed al-Akras in Darkoush, Idlib for unknown reasons.<sup>296</sup>
- **April 30, 2018:** HTS releases Ahrar al-Sham's commander, Abu Azzam Saraqib and six others after holding the men for eight months.<sup>297</sup>
- **May 28, 2018:** HTS arrests 30 internally displaced persons (IDPs), who recently arrived in Salqin, Idlib, accusing them of being ISIS members. The IDPs arrived from formerly ISIS-held neighborhoods in southern Damascus.<sup>298</sup>
- **May 29, 2018:** HTS kills one and arrests eight men it accuses of being ISIS members in Khan Sheikhoun, Idlib.<sup>299</sup>
- **June 5, 2018:** HTS attacks regime forces in Tel Sultan, Idlib, alongside al-Qaeda affiliate Hurras al-Din.<sup>300</sup>
- **June 24, 2018:** HTS arrests Syrian journalist Mohammed Fadl al-Janoudi in northern Latakia.<sup>301</sup>
- **July 13, 2018:** HTS finds and arrests the head of security for ISIS cells in Idlib and beheads him.<sup>302</sup>
- **July 30, 2018:** HTS arrests three people in Idlib accused of being regime spies.<sup>303</sup>
- **August 3, 2018:** HTS arrests 17 people in Idlib accused of promoting reconciliation with the Syrian regime or supporting ISIS.<sup>304</sup>
- **August 8, 2018:** HTS arrests 30 people accused of promoting reconciliation with the Syrian regime in southern Idlib.<sup>305</sup>
- **September 18, 2018:** HTS arrests three activists in al-Dana, Idlib. HTS also arrests two ISIS commanders hiding in Idlib. These arrests follow a series of HTS raids on ISIS hideouts that led to the executions of more than 80 ISIS fighters.<sup>306</sup>
- **September 22, 2018:** HTS arrests two activists and a third unknown man in southern Idlib.<sup>307</sup>
- **October 5, 2018:** HTS attacks Nour al-Din al-Zenki's headquarters in the west Aleppo town of Kaffar Halab and then shoots at civilians protesting their actions, killing three. Officials from Zenki and the National Liberation Front condemn HTS's actions and withdraw from the town "to prevent further clashes."<sup>308</sup>
- **November 2, 2018:** HTS joins the National Liberation Front (NLF) in retaliatory shelling of regime positions around Idlib after regime shelling kills 10 civilians.<sup>309</sup>
- **November 13, 2018:** HTS launches rockets at regime positions in Khan Touman, south Aleppo. HTS also raids the

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house of an FSA Free Idlib Army fighter in Kafr Bel, seizing his weapons and ammunition.<sup>310</sup>

- **November 22, 2018:** HTS arrests several protestors in Saraqib, Idlib, who are angry with the quality of education provided in the city. On the same day, HTS arrests several members of the Idlib City local council and raids their homes.<sup>311</sup>
- **November 24, 2018:** HTS security forces fire on protestors in Idlib City with live bullets. There are no fatalities.<sup>312</sup>
- **December 3, 2018:** HTS fighters kill a child while storming the Ahrar al-Sham-controlled villages of Jadriyat and Ibn Gharbi in Idlib.<sup>313</sup>
- **December 4, 2018:** HTS seizes the village of Zeizoun, west Hama, from Ahrar al-Sham.<sup>314</sup>
- **December 14, 2018:** HTS attacks and kills a groups of regime soldiers with an anti-tank guided missile in southern Aleppo.<sup>315</sup>
- **December 22, 2018:** HTS fighters kill a child when they fire on a passenger bus in northern Idlib.<sup>316</sup>
- **January 1, 2019:** HTS seizes most of Daraat Izza and at least three other towns from Nour al-Din al-Zenki as tensions escalate between the two factions. Two civilians are killed by HTS gunfire during the capture of the city.<sup>317</sup>
- **January 2, 2019:** HTS captures the rest of Daraat Izza and four more towns from al-Zenki in western Aleppo while other members of the NLF engage in clashes with HTS in southern Idlib, capturing one town from HTS.<sup>318</sup>
- **January 3, 2019:** HTS continues to advance on al-Zenki-held towns in western Aleppo, successfully splitting al-Zenki's territory in two. Fighting between HTS and NLF factions in Idlib intensifies, especially around the Jabal Zawayah area.<sup>319</sup>
- **January 4, 2019:** HTS captures the important Regiment 111 base along with seven major towns in western Aleppo from NLF. Fighting between HTS and NLF continues in southern Idlib and HTS arrests two commanders from the FSA Jaish al-Nasr in Khan Sheikhou.<sup>320</sup>
- **January 5, 2019:** HTS captures the final Nour al-Din al-Zenki stronghold in western Aleppo as the remnants of the group evacuate to Turkish-held Afrin. HTS also besieges the neutral town of Atarib, shelling it intensely, and captures three localities from NLF in southern Idlib.<sup>321</sup>
- **January 6, 2019:** HTS captures the town of Atarib, expelling members of the local armed factions to northern Aleppo, and closes three of the border crossings between Idlib and Afrin. HTS now controls all of rebel-held west Aleppo.<sup>322</sup>
- **January 7, 2019:** HTS seizes the village of Hazano, Idlib, from local factions and places it under the control of its Salvation Government.<sup>323</sup>
- **January 8, 2019:** HTS attacks Ahrar al-Sham in the Sahl al-Ghab area of north Hama and takes control of 16 villages and towns in north Hama and south Idlib.<sup>324</sup>
- **January 9, 2019:** Ahrar al-Sham surrenders all of its land in the Sahl al-Ghab to HTS and evacuates its fighters to north Aleppo.<sup>325</sup>
- **January 10, 2019:** The Free Idlib Police announce their dissolution after HTS raids one of their headquarters in the village of Al-Ghadafa.<sup>326</sup>
- **January 18, 2019:** HTS releases a video showing the execution of four men accused of belonging to ISIS.<sup>327</sup>
- **March 2, 2019:** HTS executes 10 men in Idlib, who are accused of belonging to ISIS.<sup>328</sup>

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**Designations:**

**Designations by the U.S. Government:**

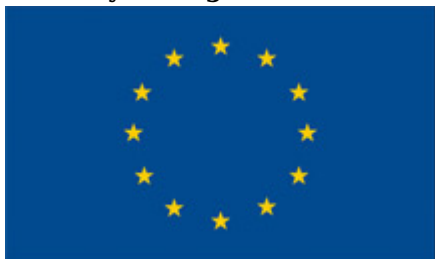


December 10, 2012: The Department of State designates the Nusra Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (under Executive Order 13224).<sup>329</sup>

May 14, 2014: The Department of the Treasury designates the Nusra Front as a Specially Designated National.<sup>330</sup>

May 31, 2018: The Department of State amends its listing of Nusra Front to include Hayat Tahrir al-Sham as an alias.<sup>331</sup>

**Designations by Foreign Governments and Organizations:**



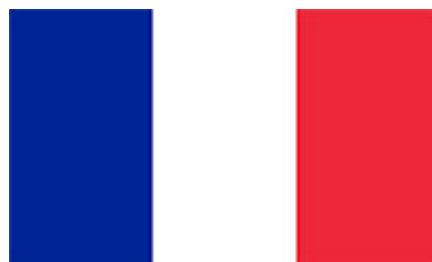
European Union— listed the Nusra Front as a sanctioned group of persons, groups, and entities on May 28, 2014.<sup>332</sup>



Australia— listed the Nusra Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on June 23, 2013.<sup>333</sup>



Canada—listed the Nusra Front as a terrorist entity on November 7, 2013.<sup>334</sup>



France—listed the Nusra Front as a terrorist entity on May 30, 2013.<sup>335</sup>

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New Zealand—listed the Nusra Front as an organization associated with Al-Qaeda on May 15, 2013.<sup>336</sup>



Russia—listed the Nusra Front as a terrorist group on December 29, 2014.<sup>337</sup>



Saudi Arabia—listed the Nusra Front as a terrorist group on March 7, 2014.<sup>338</sup>



Turkey—listed the Nusra Front as a terrorist organization on June 13, 2014.<sup>339</sup>



United Arab Emirates—listed the Nusra Front as a terrorist organization on November 15, 2014.<sup>340</sup>



United Nations—listed the Nusra Front as an entity associated with Al-Qaeda on May 30, 2013.<sup>341</sup>



United Kingdom—listed the Nusra Front as a foreign terrorist group on July 19, 2013.<sup>342</sup>

<sup>329</sup> Department of State, Public Notice, “In the Matter of Amendment of the Designation of al-Qa’ida in Iraq, aka Jam’at al Tawhid wa’al-Jihad, aka The Monotheism and Jihad Group, aka The al-Zarqawi Network, aka al-Tawhid, aka Tanzim Qa’idat al-Jihad fi Bilad alRafidayn, aka The Organization of alJihad’s Base of Operations in Iraq, aka al-Qaida of Jihad in Iraq, aka al-Qaida in Mesopotamia, aka al-Qaida in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka al-Qaida of the Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka al-Qaida of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka al-Qaida Group of Jihad in Iraq, aka al-Qaida Group of Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization of Jihad’s Base in the Country of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization Base of Jihad/ Country of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization of al-Jihad’s Base in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization Base of Jihad/ Mesopotamia, aka The Organization of al-Jihad’s Base of Operations in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka Tanzeem qa’idat al Jihad/Bildad al Raafidaini, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act; To include the aliases Al-Nusrah Front, Jabhat al-Nusrah, Jabhet al-Nusra, The Victory Front, Al Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant, Public Notice 8104,” Federal Register 77, no. 238 (December 11, 2012): 73732, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-11/pdf/2012-29870.pdf> [302]; Department of State, Public Notice, “In the Matter of the Amendment of

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the Designation of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, aka Jam'at al Tawhid wa'al-Jihad, aka The Monotheism and Jihad Group, aka The al-Zarqawi Network, aka al-Tawhid, aka Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, aka The Organization of al-Jihad's Base of Operations in Iraq, aka al-Qaida of Jihad in Iraq, aka al-Qaida in Iraq, aka al-Qaida in Mesopotamia, aka al-Qaida in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka al-Qaida of the Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka al-Qaida of Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka al-Qaida Group of Jihad in Iraq, aka al-Qaida Group of Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization Base of Jihad/Country of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization of al-Jihad's Base in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka The Organization Base of Jihad/Mesopotamia, aka The Organization of al-Jihad's Base of Operations in the Land of the Two Rivers, aka Tanzeem qa'idat al Jihad/Bildad al Raafidaini, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity pursuant to Executive Order 13224; To include the aliases Al-Nusrah Front, Jabhat al-Nusrah, Jabhet al-Nusra, The Victory Front, Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant, Public Notice 8105," Federal Register 77, no. 238 (December 11, 2012): 73732, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-11/pdf/2012-29870.pdf> [302].

<sup>330</sup> "Kingpin Act Designations and Updates; Counter Terrorism Designations and Updates; Kingpin Act Designations Removals - Special Designated Nationals Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, May 15, 2014, <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20140514.aspx> [303].

<sup>331</sup> "Amendments to the Terrorist Designations of al-Nusrah Front," U.S. Department of State, May 31, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/05/282880.htm> [304].

<sup>332</sup> "Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 583/2014 of 28 May 2014," Official Journal of the European Union, May 29, 2014, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0583&rid=2> [305].

<sup>333</sup> "Jabhat al-Nusra," Australian National Security, accessed on January 29, 2015, <http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/Jabhatal-Nusra.aspx> [306].

<sup>334</sup> "Currently Listed Entities," Public Safety Canada, accessed December 21, 2014, <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrtr/cntr-trrrsm/lstd-ntts/crrnt-lstd-ntts-eng.aspx#2049> [307].

<sup>335</sup> "Liste Terroriste Unique au 23 Décembre 2014," Trésor Direction Générale, accessed on December 25, 2014, <http://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/File/409144> [308].

<sup>336</sup> "Designated Individuals and Organisations," New Zealand Policy, November 26, 2014, <http://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/designated-entities-26-11-2014.pdf> [12].

<sup>337</sup> "Supreme Court bans Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra in Russia as terrorist organizations," Tass Russian News Agency, December 29, 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/769731> [309].

<sup>338</sup> "Saudi Arabia Designates Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Group," Reuters, March 7, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/07/us-saudi-security-idUSBREA260SM20140307> [310].

<sup>339</sup> "Turkey lists al-Nusra Front as terrorist organization," Hurriyet Daily News, June 3, 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-lists-al-nusra-front-as-terrorist-organization.aspx?pageID=238&nID=67322&NewsCatID=359> [311].

<sup>340</sup> "UAE Cabinet Approves List of Designated Terrorist Organisations, Groups," Emirates News Agency, November 15, 2014, <http://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates-international/1395272478814.html> [312].

<sup>341</sup> "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Amends Entry of One Entity on Its Sanctions List," United Nations Security Council, May 30, 2013, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc11019.doc.htm> [313].

<sup>342</sup> "UK bans Syria's Al-Qaida-Linked Nusra Front," Associated Press, July 19, 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/uk-bans-syrias-al-qaida-linked-nusra-front> [314]; "Proscribed Terrorist Organisations," Britain's Home Office, last modified January 23, 2015, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/380939/ProscribedOrganisations.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380939/ProscribedOrganisations.pdf) [315].

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## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

### Associations:

#### Ties to Extremist Entities:



[Al-Qaeda](#) [2]

The Nusra Front has a long and proven history of serving as al-Qaeda's loyal affiliate in Syria. In July 2016, however, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released an audio statement giving the Nusra Front formal permission to break ties with al-Qaeda if the link was "conflicting with [the Nusra Front's] unity and working as one body."<sup>343</sup> Hours later, Nusra Front leader Abu Muhammad al-Golani formally severed ties with al-Qaeda's central command.<sup>344</sup> Analysts have long surmised that a formal, or at least artificial, break from al-Qaeda could allow the Nusra Front the opportunity to attract more funding from Gulf states, consolidate local support, and present itself as a legitimate insurgent group in Syria.<sup>345</sup> Even as the Nusra Front formally declared its independence from al-Qaeda, the group thanked al-Qaeda's leadership for giving "priority to the interests of the people of Al-Sham, their Jihad, [and] their revolution."<sup>346</sup>

Yet recent insights have brought into question the artificiality of the Nusra Front's break from al-Qaeda. According to al-Qaeda scholar Cole Bunzel, there has been a "profound controversy in jihadi circles surrounding the nature of [HTS], which some argue has lost its way."<sup>347</sup> Among the many critics of HTS is al-Qaeda propagandist [Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi](#) [316]. In November 2016, Maqdisi withdrew his support for the Nusra Front's break from al-Qaeda, stating that his and Zawahiri's approval came only on the condition that any such break would be a "superficial step."<sup>348</sup> Instead, Maqdisi claims that the Nusra Front's leadership continued to deviate from al-Qaeda's central tenets, stating that they "stayed the course till they made it a real breaking of ties" from al-Qaeda.<sup>349</sup> Maqdisi and other al-Qaeda hardliners have denounced HTS's outreach to secular and moderate Islamist rebel factions.<sup>350</sup>

For years before the announcement, however, the Nusra Front had reaffirmed its allegiance to Zawahiri, even in the face of competing claims to its leadership. In April 2013, after Baghdadi unilaterally claimed that the Nusra Front answered to his al-Qaeda in Iraq group (now ISIS), Golani broke ties with ISIS and affirmed its allegiance to al-Qaeda central.<sup>351</sup>



[ISIS](#) [1]

The Nusra Front was allegedly formed as an extension of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI, now ISIS), and received a monthly salary from AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>352</sup> The relationship between the groups deteriorated in April 2013, when Baghdadi unilaterally announced a merger between the two groups.<sup>353</sup> The two have since engaged in violent clashes, vying for control over rebel-held territory.

<sup>343</sup> Reuters, "Al Qaeda tells Syrian branch Nusra Front it can drop links," Thomas Reuters Foundation News, July 28, 2016, <http://news.trust.org/item/20160728110801-og117> [26].

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## *Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)*

<sup>344</sup> Orient News, "Nusra Front, Abu Mohammed Joulani commander officially announced the disengagement from al-Qaeda and the establishment of a new entity," YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oossAtDYbrs> [28]; Dania Akkad, "Nusra confirms split with al-Qaeda 'to protect the Syrian revolution,'" Middle East Eye, July 28, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/nusra-front-announces-official-split-al-qaeda-520293064> [16].

<sup>345</sup> Bassem Mroue, "AP EXPLAINS: Why Syria's al-Qaida may be considering a split," Associated Press, July 27, 2016, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/d10d759d35824b70b47501d85f0ff8c3/ap-explains-why-syrias-al-qaeda-may-be-considering-split> [29]; Reuters, "Al Qaeda tells Syrian branch Nusra Front it can drop links," Thomas Reuters Foundation News, July 28, 2016, <http://news.trust.org/item/20160728110801-ogl17> [26].

<sup>346</sup> Orient News, "Nusra Front, Abu Mohammed Joulani commander officially announced the disengagement from al-Qaeda and the establishment of a new entity," YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oossAtDYbrs> [28].

<sup>347</sup> Cole Bunzel, "Diluting Jihad: Tahrir al-Sham and the Concerns of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," Jihadica, March 29, 2017, <http://www.jihadica.com/diluting-jihad/> [317].

<sup>348</sup> Cole Bunzel, "Diluting Jihad: Tahrir al-Sham and the Concerns of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," Jihadica, March 29, 2017, <http://www.jihadica.com/diluting-jihad/> [317].

<sup>349</sup> Cole Bunzel, "Diluting Jihad: Tahrir al-Sham and the Concerns of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," Jihadica, March 29, 2017, <http://www.jihadica.com/diluting-jihad/> [317].

<sup>350</sup> Cole Bunzel, "Diluting Jihad: Tahrir al-Sham and the Concerns of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," Jihadica, March 29, 2017, <http://www.jihadica.com/diluting-jihad/> [317];

Cole Bunzel, "Abandoning al-Qaida: Tahrir al-Sham and the Concerns of Sami al-Uraydi," Jihadica, May 12, 2017, <http://www.jihadica.com/abandoning-al-qaeda/> [27].

<sup>351</sup> "Syria Crisis: Al-Nusra Pledges Allegiance to Al-Qaeda," BBC News, April 10, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22095099> [38].

<sup>352</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in Iraq, Al Nusrah Front Emerge as Rebranded Single Entity," *Long War Journal*, April 9, 2013, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/04/the\\_emir\\_of\\_al\\_qaeda.php#ixzz3Mw15S2jb](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/04/the_emir_of_al_qaeda.php#ixzz3Mw15S2jb) [36].

<sup>353</sup> "Syria Crisis: Al-Nusra Pledges Allegiance to Al-Qaeda," BBC News, April 10, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22095099> [38].



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## *Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)*

### Media Coverage:

#### *Qatar and the Nusra Front*

Qatar stands accused of supporting and funding the Nusra Front.<sup>354</sup> The Qatari government helped broker the release of 13 nuns kidnapped by the group in December 2013. It brokered the August 2014 release of American hostage Peter Theo Curtis, as well as the September 2014 release of 45 U.N. peacekeepers.

On the release of the 45 U.N. peacekeepers, Qatar's state-owned Al Jazeera called the peacekeepers "Fijian soldiers" that were kidnapped and "held" for two weeks by the Nusra Front. The article emphasizes that the peacekeepers were reportedly in good condition and notes, "A UN spokesman said in New York on Thursday no ransom had been requested for the Fijian peacekeepers and none was paid."<sup>355</sup>

Nonetheless, rumors that Qatar paid the group a ransom fee soon circulated. Qatar's foreign minister denied the claims,<sup>356</sup> but Israel's Channel 2 news station released video footage allegedly showing that Qatar paid the group \$25 million in ransom.<sup>357</sup>

Al Jazeera did not cover any follow-ups to the story, including the Channel 2 report and the foreign minister's statement. The Al Jazeera article regarding the release of the peacekeepers ends by highlighting Qatar's seemingly helpful role in the hostage release process: "US officials have said that Qatar played a critical role in persuading the Nusra Front to free American journalist Peter Theo Curtis last month, whom the front had been holding hostage since 2012."<sup>358</sup>

<sup>354</sup> Jay Solomon, "U.S.-Qatar Alliance Strains Coalition Against Islamic State," Wall Street Journal, October 10, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-qatar-alliance-strains-coalition-against-islamic-state-1412983181> [318].

<sup>355</sup> "Syria Rebels Free UN Peacekeepers," Al Jazeera, September 11, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/syria-rebels-free-un-peacekeepers-201491175643793356.html> [319].

<sup>356</sup> Daniel Bases, "Qatar's Foreign Minister Denies Paying Ransoms to Militant Groups," Reuters, September 29, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/30/us-mideast-crisis-qatar-idUSKCN0HP02720140930> [320].

<sup>357</sup> "Report: UN Had Qatar Pay Off Al-Qaida Fighters for Release of Fiji Peacekeepers," Haaretz, October 11, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.620228> [87].

<sup>358</sup> "Syria Rebels Free UN Peacekeepers," Al Jazeera, September 11, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/syria-rebels-free-un-peacekeepers-201491175643793356.html> [319].

#### *The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on the Nusra Front*

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) is a pro-opposition monitoring group. A score of mainstream Western and Arabic media outlets rely on SOHR for on-site data. Although the monitoring group is pro-opposition, it tends to make a noticeable distinction between the Nusra Front and other rebel groups, and has acknowledged the group's links to al-Qaeda as far back as November 2012.<sup>359</sup> The group frequently uses descriptors like "radical"<sup>360</sup> and "extremist,"<sup>361</sup> in addition to "al-Qaeda-linked"<sup>362</sup> and "al-Qaeda loyalist," when describing the Nusra Front.<sup>363</sup>

<sup>359</sup> Syria Rebels Take Swathe of East but Clash with Kurd Militia," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 23, 2012, [http://syriahr.com/en/2012/11/Syria\\_rebels\\_take\\_swathe\\_of\\_east\\_but\\_clash\\_with\\_kurd\\_militia/](http://syriahr.com/en/2012/11/Syria_rebels_take_swathe_of_east_but_clash_with_kurd_militia/) [321].

<sup>360</sup> "Friends of Syria Heading to Morocco to Boost Opposition," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 11, 2012, [http://syriahr.com/en/2012/12/Friends\\_of\\_Syria\\_heading\\_to\\_Morocco\\_to\\_boost\\_opposition/](http://syriahr.com/en/2012/12/Friends_of_Syria_heading_to_Morocco_to_boost_opposition/) [322].

<sup>361</sup> "Syrian Sectarian Fighting Spills into Lebanon," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 11, 2012, [http://syriahr.com/en/2012/12/Syrian\\_sectarian\\_fighting\\_spills\\_into\\_Lebanon/](http://syriahr.com/en/2012/12/Syrian_sectarian_fighting_spills_into_Lebanon/) [133].

<sup>362</sup> "Syria Rebels Hope Arms Will Flow to New Fighter Command," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 11, 2012, [http://syriahr.com/en/2012/12/Syria\\_rebels\\_hope\\_arms\\_will\\_flow\\_to\\_new\\_fighter\\_command/](http://syriahr.com/en/2012/12/Syria_rebels_hope_arms_will_flow_to_new_fighter_command/) [323].

<sup>363</sup> "Syria Rebels Take Swathe of East but Clash with Kurd Militia," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 23, 2012, [http://syriahr.com/en/2012/11/Syria\\_rebels\\_take\\_swathe\\_of\\_east\\_but\\_clash\\_with\\_kurd\\_militia/](http://syriahr.com/en/2012/11/Syria_rebels_take_swathe_of_east_but_clash_with_kurd_militia/) [321].

#### *The Nusra Front Pledges Allegiance to Al-Qaeda*

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## ***Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)***

On April 10, 2013, Nusra Front leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani released a statement rejecting Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's claim that al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Nusra Front had merged. In the statement, al-Golani pledged his allegiance to al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

*The New York Times* covered al-Baghdadi's announcement, but did not immediately address al-Golani's response, including his public pledge of fealty to Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>364</sup> *The Wall Street Journal* covered both al-Baghdadi's claim and al-Golani's response in one article titled, "Al Qaeda Declares Stake in Syrian Rebellion." Its author, Nour Malas, predicted that al-Qaeda's now-open involvement in Syria would bring a schism to the rebel movement.<sup>365</sup>

Al Jazeera reported on al-Baghdadi's April 9 declaration,<sup>366</sup> as well as al-Golani's pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>367</sup> The article on al-Golani's response seemed to cover the announcement with a number of qualifiers: "A man claiming to be the head of a key group fighting the Syrian government has purportedly pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda..."<sup>368</sup> In covering the Nusra Front's declaration of allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri, CNN seemed to temper al-Golani's pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda by emphasizing that al-Golani had rejected the merger with al-Qaeda in Iraq and stated his intention to continue cooperating with other rebel groups. The article opens: "A Syrian jihadist group appears to have pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda's leader—but also stressed it can achieve a Syrian Islamic state only by working with other rebels, including secularists. The group, al-Nusra Front, also denies an earlier claim that it has merged with Iraq's al-Qaeda affiliate, according to an audio message purported to be from al-Nusra general commander Abu Muhammad al-Joulani."<sup>369</sup>

<sup>364</sup> Hania Mourtada and Rick Gladstone, "Iraq's Branch of Al Qaeda Merges With Syria Jihadists," *New York Times*, April 9, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/10/world/middleeast/Iraq-and-Syria-jihadists-combine.html> [324].

<sup>365</sup> Nour Malas, "Al Qaeda Declares Stake in Syrian Rebellion," *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323550604578412280884558740> [325].

<sup>366</sup> "Iraqi al-Qaeda and Syrian group 'merge,'" *Al Jazeera*, April 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/201349194856244589.html> [326].

<sup>367</sup> "Syria Group 'Pledges Allegiance' to Al-Qaeda," *Al Jazeera*, April 10, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013410114851988704.html> [327].

<sup>368</sup> "Syria Group 'Pledges Allegiance' to Al-Qaeda," *Al Jazeera*, April 10, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/2013410114851988704.html> [327].

<sup>369</sup> Saad Abedine and Jason Hanna, "Syrian Jihad Group Pledges Allegiance to Al Qaeda, Denies Merger," *CNN*, April 10, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/10/world/meast/syria-al-nusra-front/index.html> [328].

### ***Responses to U.S. Designation of the Nusra Front***

On December 10, 2012, the U.S. listed the Nusra Front as an alias for al-Qaeda in Iraq (now ISIS). The designation was met with a mixed response from Western and Arab media outlets. In the aftermath of the designation through December 2012, Al Jazeera published 14 articles that mentioned the Nusra Front. Seven of the articles qualified the U.S. designation by putting 'terrorist' or 'terrorist organization' in quotation marks.<sup>370</sup> Three referenced the designation without the quotation marks, while the remaining four did not reference the designation at all.<sup>371</sup> In an op-ed titled "The 'War on Terror' and the Arab Spring," Al Jazeera correspondent Mark Perry claimed that the U.S. designation reflects "a profound misunderstanding" of current events in the Arab world. Perry recommends that "Instead of being afraid, we should be filled with pride: These people are so dedicated to the idea of liberty that they're actually fighting for it."<sup>372</sup> *The New York Times* did not use quotation marks to describe the terrorist designation,<sup>373</sup> nor did *The Wall Street Journal*<sup>374</sup> or *The Washington Post*.<sup>375</sup>

In Time's first article covering the terrorist designation, the author put 'terrorist' in quotation marks while describing the designation.<sup>376</sup> The article's sub-headline states, "One of the most effective anti-Assad militias has just been designated a 'terrorist' organization by the U.S."<sup>377</sup>

<sup>370</sup> "Syria Rebels 'Seize Key Aleppo Army Base,'" *Al Jazeera*, December 11, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/20121210104312760502.html> [329]; "Scores Reportedly Killed in Syria's Hama," *Al Jazeera*,

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December 11, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/20121211102930540995.html> [330]; "Friends of Syria' Recognise Opposition," Al Jazeera, December 12, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212124541767116.html> [331]; "Scores Reportedly Killed in Syria's Hama," Al Jazeera, December 11, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212124541767116.html> [331]; "Syrians Back Al-Nusra Despite 'Terrorist' Tag," Al Jazeera, December 14, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2012/12/20121214164411696160.html> [332]; "Syrians Decry US Blacklisting of Rebel Group," Al Jazeera, December 15, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212157416500378.html> [333]; Mark Perry, "The 'War on Terror' and the Arab Spring," Al Jazeera, December 17, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/12/2012121674256897741.html> [334]; "Syria 'Secures Chemical Weapons Stockpile,'" Al Jazeera, December 23, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212221532021654.html> [335].

<sup>371</sup> Zeina Khodr, "Stalemate Stokes Anger at Rebels in Aleppo," Al Jazeera, December 11, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/12/20121211125010153551.html> [336]; "UN Says Syria Conflict Is 'Overtly Sectarian,'" Al Jazeera, December 11, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012122015525051365.html> [337]; "Brahimi Meets Syria's Assad Amid Violence," Al Jazeera, December 24, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/20121224101635166809.html> [338]; "Children 'Killed' in Syria Army Tank Attack," Al Jazeera, December 26, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012122610221539127.html> [339].

<sup>372</sup> Mark Perry, "The 'War on Terror' and the Arab Spring," Al Jazeera, December 17, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/12/2012121674256897741.html> [334].

<sup>373</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Anne Barnard, "U.S. Places Militant Syrian Rebel Group on List of Terrorist Organizations," New York Times, December 10, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/11/world/middleeast/us-designates-syrian-al-nusra-front-as-terrorist-group.html> [340]; "Al Qaeda in Syria," New York Times, December 10, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/11/opinion/al-qaeda-in-syria.html> [341]; Mark Landler, Michael R. Gordon and Anne Barnard, "U.S. Will Grant Recognition to Syrian Rebels, Obama Says," New York Times, December 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/12/world/middleeast/united-states-involvement-in-syria.html> [342]; Mark Landler and Michael R. Gordon, "Obama Says U.S. Will Recognize Syrian Rebels," New York Times, December 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/12/us/obama-says-us-will-recognize-syrian-rebels.html> [343]; Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "Syria Uses Scud Missiles in New Effort to Push Back Rebels," The New York Times, December 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/world/middleeast/syria-war-developments-assad.html> [344].

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# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

### Rhetoric:



[358]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, January 14, 2019](#) [358]

"We consider the PKK to be an enemy of this revolution. It controls areas inhabited by large numbers of Sunni Arabs...We are in favor of this region being liberated from the PKK ... We would not stand in the way of an operation against an enemy of the revolution."<sup>378</sup>



[359]

[Abu al-Fatah al-Farghali, January 15, 2019](#) [359]

"HTS can't strive to obstruct the liberation of Sunni Muslims [east of the Euphrates] from the rule of the atheists [YPG/SDF] even if that is at hands of the secularists [Turkey] less far from the religion."<sup>379</sup>



[360]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, August 22, 2018](#) [360]

"The weapons of the revolution and jihad... are a red line on which concessions are unacceptable, and they will never be put on the negotiations table...We urge our people in Aleppo to remain steadfast. The mujahideen will not fail you."<sup>380</sup>



[361]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, August 2018](#) [361]

"The red line [ceasefire deal between Turkey and Russia] is never negotiable and will never be put on the negotiating table."<sup>381</sup>



[362]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, January 2018](#) [362]

"[We must engage in] a war of ideas, a war of minds, a war of wills, a war of perseverance."<sup>382</sup>



[363]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, July 28, 2016](#) [363]

"This new organization [the Nusra Front, renamed the Levantine Conquest Front] aims to fulfill the following: 1. Work toward establishing the religion of Allah (swt), having his shariah (law) as legislation..."<sup>383</sup>



[364]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, July 28, 2016](#) [364]

"[We will continue] fulfilling the requests of the people of Al Sham to expose the deceptions of the International community, the leaders being the U.S. and Russia..."<sup>384</sup>



[365]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, July 28, 2016](#) [365]

"[In formally splitting from al-Qaeda, we are not] compromising or sacrificing our solid beliefs or laxity in the necessity of the continuity of the Jihad of Al-Sham."<sup>385</sup>

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)



[366]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, July 28, 2016](#) [366]

"We thank [al-Qaeda's leadership for their] proper assessment of the general benefits [of] the Jihad. Their noble stance will be recorded in the annals of history. Their blessed leadership has, and shall continue to be, an exemplar of putting the needs of the community and their higher interests before the interest of any individual group. They have practically implemented the words of Sheikh Osama bin Laden (may Allah have mercy on him)."<sup>386</sup>



[367]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, July 28, 2016](#) [367]

"We thank [al-Qaeda's leadership] for their stance, whereby they gave priority to the interests of the people of Al-Sham [Syria], their [Syrian] Jihad, their revolution."<sup>387</sup>



[368]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, July 28, 2016](#) [368]

"We would like to thank... [leader of al-Qaeda] Dr. Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri and his vice, Sheikh Ahmad Hasan Abu Al-Khayr especially, may Allah protect them."<sup>388</sup>



[369]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, July 28, 2016](#) [369]

"We would like to thank our brothers, the commanders of al-Qa'eda."<sup>389</sup>



[370]

[Abu Muhammad al-Golani, June 3, 2015](#) [370]

"We will be the first soldiers for an Islamic government that implements Shariah."<sup>390</sup>



[371]

[Abu Sulayman, May 8, 2015](#) [371]

"Jihad is not in need of us, we are in dire need of jihad."<sup>391</sup>



[372]

[Abu Sulayman, May 2015](#) [372]

"I do believe that our affiliation with a global jihad (al-Qa'ida) is more positive than negative."<sup>392</sup>



[Abu Ahmed, December 2012](#) [373]

"Our faith is very strong and we're not afraid of death, of becoming martyrs. This is what drives us, what makes us brave. We will not stop until the regime falls. And I advise all my people to be good Muslims to help win this war."<sup>393</sup>



# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

[373]



[\*Abu Ahmed, On al-Qaeda, December 2012\*](#) [374]

"I like them because they are mujaheddin who want to apply Sharia."<sup>394</sup>

[374]



[\*Abu Ahmed, December 2012\*](#) [375]

"We are underdeveloped now because we left the path of Allah. Perhaps this is why this war is so cruel: as a punishment for our sins."<sup>395</sup>

[375]



[\*Abu Ahmed, December 2012\*](#) [376]

"Our first goal is to get rid of Assad. Then we want a state where the Quran is the only source of law. Sharia is the right path for all humanity - all other laws make people unhappy."<sup>396</sup>

[376]



[\*Abu Ahmed, December 2012\*](#) [377]

"We don't want to leave modernity behind. We will not get out of our cars and ride donkeys from now on. We simply want our judges to apply Sharia [law] and not the civil code."<sup>397</sup>

[377]



[\*The Nusra Front Media Wing, January 2015\*](#) [378]

"As a result of the deterioration of security in Lebanon, you will hear about surprises regarding the fate of the prisoners with us."<sup>398</sup>

[378]



[\*Abu Lokman, Nusra Front Senior Commander, January 2013\*](#) [379]

"When the US placed us on their list of terrorists, it did us no harm, it elevated our reputation. The Syrian people hate the American government. Thanks be to God, we consider this a medal of honour."<sup>399</sup>

[379]



[\*The Nusra Front Statement, August 3, 2012\*](#) [380]

"Perhaps this operation [kidnapping and killing of Syrian state television presenter Mohammed al-Saeed] and others will serve as an example to all who support this tyrannical regime, so that they may repent to God. Otherwise, the swords of the mujahideen will cut off their heads and purify the Levant (Syria) from their obscenity."<sup>400</sup>

[380]



[\*The Nusra Front Statement, June 30, 2012\*](#) [381]

"Let no one condemn us for this operation [attack at Syrian state television building, killing seven] and say it is not proper to attack the media or media people, especially since we had already presented that this lying channel fights and may be even more

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

[381] effective than military power, and it was the one that was glorifying the tyrant day and night."<sup>401</sup>



[Nusra Front Statement, June 2012](#) [382]

"God enabled the lions of the east in Deir al-Zor... to get the necks of a group of dogs from the security agencies and the thugs. Thirteen of those criminals were detained ... each of them faced his end in the worst killing and the very worst fate."<sup>402</sup>

[382]



[Abu Adnan, Nusra Front Shariah Law Official, Date Unknown](#) [383]

"We detained them [unarmed regime loyalists], lined them up and killed them. They were fighters fighting us."<sup>403</sup>

[383]



[Sami al-Oraidi, Tweet, June 29, 2014](#) [384]

"Whoever heard [ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-] Adnani's speech announcing the Caliphate, will actually find it to be a war announcement on the Muslim and not Annon about the Caliphitte." (Tweet)<sup>404</sup>

[384]



[Sami al-Oraidi, Tweet, June 29, 2014](#) [385]

ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad "Al-'Adnani does not know what comes out of his head." (Tweet)<sup>405</sup>

[385]



[Sami al-Oraidi, May 19, 2014](#) [386]

"God willing, we will not concede Sharia. It is either Sharia or martyrdom."<sup>406</sup>

[386]



[Sami al-Oraidi, May 19, 2014](#) [387]

"Most battalions on the ground are fighting to establish Sharia, and they are all our brothers even if their names are different."<sup>407</sup>

[387]



[Sami al-Oraidi, May 19, 2014](#) [388]

"As for those who want a secular state, they are a minority, and we kindly ask for them to return to their senses, and be wary of what has happened in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya."<sup>408</sup>

[388]



[Sami al-Oraidi, May 19, 2014](#) [389]

"Life in mountains and caves under Sharia, is better than a life in palaces under else."<sup>409</sup>

# COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

## Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)

[389]



[Sami al-Oraidi, May 19, 2014](#) [390]

"He who is too embarrassed, in writing or in speech, to admit to wanting Sharia is in no state to effectively govern such a state."<sup>410</sup>

[390]



[Sami al-Oraidi, May 19, 2014](#) [391]

"We say only say as Sheikh Al-Joulani said 'People of the Levant, our lives for you, will be sacrificed.'"<sup>411</sup>

[391]



[Abu Sulayman, 2014](#) [392]

"The cowardly strikes of the US, planes roaring over our heads and drones spying on the Muslims will not deter us from our path."<sup>412</sup>

[392]

<sup>378</sup> "PKK is 'enemy' of Syria revolution, says jihadist leader," Rudaw, January 14, 2019, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/140120195> [393].

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<sup>385</sup> Orient News, "Nusra Front, Abu Mohammed Joulani commander officially announced the disengagement from al-Qaeda and the establishment of a new entity," YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oossAtDYbrs> [28]; Dania Akkad, "Nusra confirms split with al-Qaeda 'to protect the Syrian revolution,'" Middle East Eye, July 28, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/nusra-front-announces-official-split-al-qaeda-520293064> [16].

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## *Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)*

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